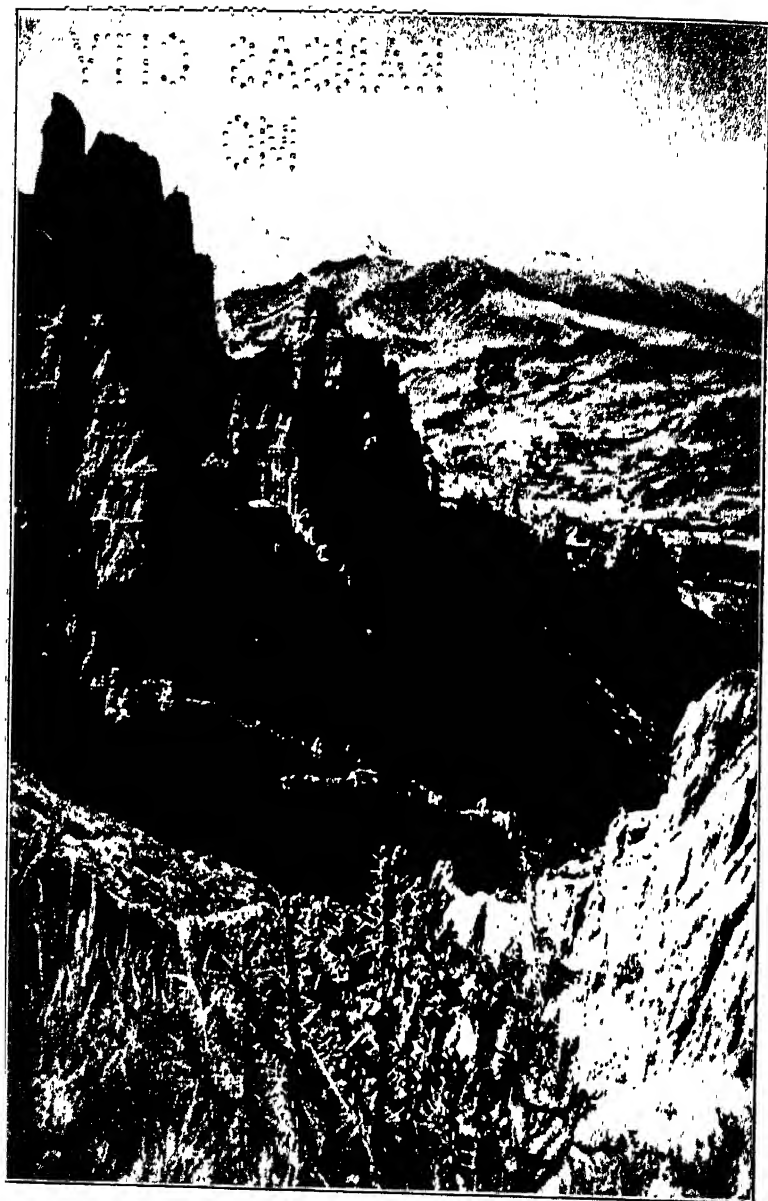


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ABOVE THE HIDDEN CITY

LAND OF TO-MORROW

A Story of South America

by

R. W. THOMPSON

*With Thirty-seven Illustrations
and Three Maps*



D. APPLETON-CENTURY COMPANY
NEW YORK

INCORPORATED

LONDON

1937

■

FOR
A.H. AND C.H.B.
IN GRATITUDE

■

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CHAPTER I

GOING AWAY

I. THE BEGINNING

BETWEEN Holborn and the Law Courts there is a maze of ancient alleyways and squares, and there are in these dim alleyways small bookshops with many-paned bow windows, the sort of shops that Dickens knew well. There is a musty smell of law, a pious complacency, in all this part; in the old grimy buildings; in the huge leather-bound tomes in the full-bellied windows of the bookshops; in the few black-coated figures one is likely to meet. The twisting grimy little alleys and the sudden squares are baffling and irrelevant as counsel's speech; very hard to follow to the light.

I should think this would be a most attractive piece of old London where, on a spring morning, with the sun sending pale shafts to brighten obscure corners, one might dawdle happily, remote from the din of Holborn and Fleet Street, submerged in a pleasurable coma.

The last time I walked that way it was not a spring morning. It was four o'clock one afternoon in early January, and the sun—if there was a sun—was already lighting some remote part of the world. At four o'clock that afternoon London was under darkness, and so was I.

This attractive piece of old London was to me a diabolic twisty maze; ill lit. And the more I hurried the more the ridiculous passages obstructed me. My mind was seething with a race of dark thoughts, darker than the wretched alleyways, and equally inescapable. There was a steady drizzle carefully saturating every hole and corner and making yellow pools of reflection beneath the box-like lantern lamps that hung from the grimy walls.

I had just been told —sympathetically indeed—that most of

my earnings from a year of hard work were not mine. I could no more follow the tortuous reasonings of lawyers than the lay-out of the drizzle-soaked warren I traversed so blackly on that January afternoon. For three months interviews with lawyers and the worries of legal business, in which I had not before indulged, had spoiled my work. For two years I should have to write day after day, and my earnings, beyond a small pittance for the maintenance of myself and family, would not be mine.

I had a novel to write, not begun, already due in the publisher's hands. I was in no mood to write it: in fact it was impossible to write it: I had no money.

I tell you all this so that you shall not think I was mad when I emerged into the bustling hubbub of Fleet Street and had a thought as solid and sure as the grey pattern of St. Mary le Strand standing like a rock parting the traffic stream. Also, the story begins exactly where I began it.

My thought was simply: Go right away—Leave it all behind. See new things; new people; a new world.

And with that thought I was at once myself. No more could I write at the accustomed desk; live in the accustomed rooms; meet and talk pleasantly with the accustomed people. That was even more impossible than to go away.

The idea flooded my mind like a simple truth and sent the dark thoughts scurrying. If it would have remained simply a castle in the air to ease a dark hour I do not know, for, at that moment, fate or the devil or both took a hand: I met an editor. Within thirty seconds I had committed myself—I can't help doing that.

"I'm going away," I said.

"Lucky devil," snorted the editor. "Time for a quick one?"

I laughed. It seemed to me very funny to be called a lucky devil simply because I had had a mad thought perhaps half a minute earlier.

We had a drink.

"Where to this time, Tommy?" asked the editor,

I had not thought of that.

"Somewhere far——" I temporized.

"Taking the wife and kids?"

This editorial mind was almost as bad as a legal mind. How the devil did I know what I was going to do?

"I've only just this minute thought of it," I said testily. "Haven't got the whole thing cut and dried."

We had another drink.

"Well, let's know when and where you're going," said the editor. "Do us a farewell article."

So it had become a certainty that I was going away. I was a traveller already; seeing things with a traveller's eyes. New life and vigour were rushing into me, my mind hastening over the world, meeting difficulties, beating them. I was a lucky devil. I had just lost all I had, and most of what I might have in the immediate future . . . but I was going away—lucky devil!

When Pat, my wife, lifted her eyes half questioning, half in sympathy, as I came into the familiar room—which would not be familiar any more—with the desk at which I had written and written and at which I would not write another line, she saw none of the miserable thoughts and darknesses I had left behind me in the labyrinth between Holborn and Fleet Street, but only this new excitement.

"What happened?"

"Er . . . Oh . . . That!" I had almost forgotten "That," and was disturbed to have it resurrected. "Oh, we can't go on. I haven't any more money."

Her shoulders shrugged slightly. She had had the waiting part; the dreary finding of pennies for food; the changing of napkins. And she would have all that worse than ever—she thought—now.

"Don't worry," I said, and sat down on the arm of her chair. "We're going away . . . think of it. You've never travelled far afield. We're going to places . . . strange places——"

"Tom," she said severely, and a trifle bitterly: "I knew something was up with you. What have you done? Where are we going?" And then, in a tired voice: "You know we can't go anywhere. We're bust."

"Give me a chance, old Lass," I said soothingly. "I know it's impossible, but we are going. I don't know where, and I don't know how, just at this moment, but I soon will. I only thought of it an hour ago. . . . Think of it—you and I, wandering around together just as I've always hoped—Java or, may be, Jamaica."

"Jerusalem or Jericho," humoured Pat. "Any more places beginning with J?"

But she laughed, and we kissed each other and were happy—because she knew that, mad as it was, I meant it, and there would be no harm in playing at going away even if it did not happen.

I said: "Peru's interesting—or Africa—and Mexico. Ever since I read that book of William Spratling's I've longed to see Mexico."

"Too civilized," said Pat.

So we travelled round the world, in and out of strange places, over deserts and mountains, inland seas, and to the ends of great rivers where there were waterfalls as vast as Niagara—but, of course, not Niagara. We weren't tourists.

"It'll be grand," I said. "No more grinding out words at that desk."

"... But your novel?" she asked in that way women have of knocking the guilt off the gingerbread.

"Oh that—I'll write it on the way."

Good heavens—the unwritten novel was the very reason why we must go. We would go wherever we were going on a cargo ship, the obvious place to write a novel. In an instant I was convinced that the only possible place to write a novel was on a cargo ship going a long way. My agent would agree with that.

I wrote that night to a friend who had some cargo ships:

"Have you a ship sailing to anywhere soon?"

The next day was a day of uncomfortable thoughts. The children? The house? The money? Three nice little problems.

A family in the village would care for the children, we decided. Our little girl was two and a half; our boy six months. They would not miss us. We found this disconcerting, but life could not be all honey.

My friend replied promptly.

"Pat." I yelled from the hall. "We're off! We're going to South America—sailing in three weeks——"

Pat came downstairs in a hurry and read the letter.

"Good Lord," she murmured. "It really might happen!" And then she hugged my arm and was silent. I knew that only in that moment had the possibility become real to her, although she had played the game all through the previous day.

"Oh, Tom," she said at last; "Do you really think you can pull it off?"

"I swear by the Nine Gods I'll pull it off," I answered soberly. For this thing had gone beyond the idea stage.

During the next three weeks our spirits soared and sank daily, sometimes hourly. Several times my wife accompanied me to London as moral support. I would defy anyone to call any project hare-brained with Pat's grey eyes telling them it wasn't. Hare-brained or not this South American adventure had to happen. We were desperate. Somewhere in the back of our minds was the thought that we might fail, and the tension grew as the sailing day raced nearer.

The arrangements for the three months' round trip were easy; paying weekly, the fares plus the allowances to the village family for the children came to a good deal less than living at home. On that basis the scope of the voyage grew alarmingly. Every editor I visited expressed interest in a different part of South America. One said: "I'd like Andes

stuff—something along the route of the Spaniards through Tucuman and Jujuy and diagonally across the high plain of the Andes to Peru.”

Another said: “ The Yungas valley, north-east of Bolivia and the headwaters of the Amazon—the Beni country—interests me enormously.”

Yet another: “ Transport, I believe, is wonderful out there. And I’d like stuff about the ramifications of the great river system of the Parana.”

And, of course, everyone said: “ You must go to the Gran Chaco and let us know about the war. And Paraguay. What happens in Paraguay? Then there are those Jesuit ruins in Misiones, and some strange colonies we’ve heard about vaguely——”

It was endless. To each suggestion I agreed with outward signs of enthusiasm; and then I went home with the latest news on the growth of the adventure. We kept our fears from each other fairly successfully.

Within two weeks we had arranged to make a network of the whole central portion of South America. But how?

I did not know. We would do it: we had to do it.

A casual remark to a film company very nearly added the impedimenta of film cameras and assistants to the expedition—it was by now worthy of that name. But I like travelling light and will not even carry a parcel in the street, so the project faded out.

Then I had a stroke of luck. I was introduced to a man who had lived for twenty years wandering about Latin America and mapping it out.

“ You know Don Jose of course? ” he remarked.

I admitted that I did not.

“ Heavens! ” he said. “ You *must* know Don Jose! ”

So that was arranged. I felt I was in the hands of fate, and it would be best to go quietly, even joyously.

Just as the heavy mahogany door of Don Jose’s office opened to me the inestimable friend who had accomplished

this introduction for me whispered urgently the words: *Cataratas del Iguazu—Cataratas del Iguazu.*

My Spanish was rusty after ten years' disuse and I could not sort out the words, but I had them safe, parrot fashion. A moment later I was shaking hands with the tall dark and immaculate Don Jose and accepting one of his cigarettes.

I told him the story. I was intensely interested in South America, and had already written a book set in La Pampa Central and Buenos Aires Province. I would, of course, write another book about this trip, and a number of newspaper articles.

Don Jose was charming.

"I will write at once to my brother, Don Alberto," he assured me. "See him as soon as you arrive in Buenos Aires."

"Cataratasdeliguazu," I murmured in the manner of one uttering a doubtful password.

"Ah," said Don Jose affably. "You'd like to see them?"

"More than anything," I answered gravely.

"Good. Don Alberto will arrange it without doubt."

A few moments later I was outside walking rapidly along a prosaic city street whose every building jeered at my fairyland. Could it be possible that I was really going? That I would really see the wonderful places newspaper editors and others had conjured with such facility?

The fares and hotel expenses alone would cost at least ten times the sum I could arrange to have available over a period of six months after babies and things were paid for. It seemed hopeless.

Meanwhile Pat had her troubles at home. The whole trip was mad, wicked and unnecessary according to sober middle-aged feminine opinion. Why didn't she stop me going? Refuse to go with me? How could she leave the "dear children"? And the house—suppose a tenant couldn't be found for the house? How were we going to pay the rent? I did not know.

The question of the children was the only one that rattled Pat. There were, it appeared, two main schools of thought on the subject. The first said: "How cruel—inhuman—unmotherly." The second: "Oh—they'll never miss you at that age. Forget you ten minutes after you're out of the door." Both were disconcerting.

So through a turmoil of hopes and fears, and in silent terror of a last minute hitch, zero hour approached.

II. ZERO HOUR

On the eve of sailing all that I could do I had done. There was nothing left but to wait. I wanted to be aboard our cargo ship with the feel of decks heaving to the swell of the sea, and I tried hard to pin my mind on that. It was impossible. I tried not to worry about where we should get to—whether we should get beyond Buenos Aires; beyond Liverpool; beyond a dream.

But there was some consolation even in that.

"Well," I said, "if the worst comes to the worst I shall write a story about these last three weeks; the places we didn't go to; the stupendous wonder of the Cataracts of Iguazu (I had, of course, sorted out the jumble) that we didn't see——"

Our finances were down to the limits. We had five pounds in hand; an arrangement for twenty pounds to be paid in Buenos Aires on arrival; forty pounds six weeks later, and a final forty pounds one month after that. On these sums I had set myself to travel ten thousand miles through South America and live for a period of four months. It would be an adventure of an entirely new order. Before, I had had only myself to worry about; and there are few things easier than for a young man to wander the world even without any money at all. Now I had a wife.

Not for a moment did I have a doubt of her. She had had no experience of travel, tropical climates, or hardships, but she was the right sort. Pat is very feminine to look at, slim, and

rather pale, and without much physical strength, but internally she is as strong as a lion. I mistrust physical strength. It is always the hale and hearty who succumb to a diet of slimy water and strange foods. Malaria, too, takes a delight in nipping the hale and hearty well and truly.

But most of all Pat has a mind capable of rising above discomfort. That is the one essential of the adventurer; discomfort simply doesn't matter. It doesn't exist.

On the last night we had a few friends in, and spent a few shillings of our five pounds on beer. I wanted to get away from myself, and it was cheering to hear casual remarks like: "Don't forget to send us postcards." And Pat, as she linked her arm in mine on the verandah after the guests had departed, saying quietly: "Well,—our last night here . . . for a long time. . . ." tailing off into a wistful silence.

I suppose I had spent so much time persuading doubters that there could be nothing more simple than my proposed trip that I had omitted to persuade myself. I wanted someone to come along and tell me that my idea was sound.

In the morning, just as we said good-bye to the babes, a rainbow straddled the sky and put its foot down right in our garden. We hailed it as an omen. I, at least, was superstitious as any negro in the cotton fields, and would have accepted the gift of a rabbit's foot with tears in my eyes. I was keyed up to the limit after the fantasy that had whirled me from my first idea in Fleet Street to the starting point of Euston, the Liverpool train, and heaven knew where beyond that.

When at last the train moved out we sank down in the luxury of our compartment and just sighed: "We're off."

And with that I was suddenly refreshed, released from all my cares, so that my mind rushed forwards and outwards again, and the small events of that journey to Liverpool impressed themselves vividly. I was so elated in myself that it was a source of wonder that people behaved normally. Could it be that they did not know? My heart was singing:

We're going to South America. Can't you see we're *different*. . . .

And people went on talking about the prices of this and that, and what they had said to George about Ethel's behaviour. . . . And we were going to South America—adventuring!

There was a young lady, very brisk and "sporty," with a face that seemed all points and a voice that rushed up and down the scale on every sentence at immense speed. An incredible voice; an incredible young lady. She had found a young man to stand her lunch, and her voice advised him and the whole dining-car, high above and below the rattle of cutlery, first as to where she had met him (and he seemed vaguely to remember) and then of her terrific views on love, marriage and babies. She believed in babies. She simply lurved babies—new *men* babies—*with* hair—not bald babies—ugh! She held me wrapt. She took me out of myself. Life was already an adventure. She was the first of the strange people we should meet. But I was a little annoyed that she did not know we were on our way to South America. I liked to imagine how her voice might have dealt with that had I had the courage to tap her on the arm with a spoon and advise her in a suitably impressive manner.

III. "OUR SHIP"

Pat's ideas of cargo ships were rather vague and I wondered how she would react to the grimy confusion of hawsers and rubbish that is any small cargo ship just before sailing. We had had a letter from the shipping company advising us that: "The s.s. 'Kayeson' will sail at 1.39 a.m."

This letter pleased me hugely, and gave Pat the impression that sailing was simply "a whistle and a tootle and away we go"—in the words of Will Fyffe. It also encouraged her to think of the ship as neat as a parcel ready for the post.

"I'd no idea tramps sailed to the minute like that!" she said. Well, neither had I. But I said casually: "Why not?"

The tide serves to the minute," and went on to present a picture of all the ships in Liverpool slipping away from the docks in a great huddle down the Mersey, rather like the Derby field coming up to Tattenham Corner. Also I advised severely: "You mustn't call our ship a tramp. She isn't a tramp. She's a regular on this South American run—a liner."

"You didn't tell me it was a liner," Pat grumbled. "I thought a liner was a huge ship with hundreds of passengers."

"Well, it isn't. It's a ship in a regular trade on a regular run. My friend's ships don't tramp!" I said scornfully.

"Going aboard to-night?" they asked casually when we arrived at the shipping office.

"Why, yes——" I said. "Aren't we sailing to-night?"

"Not a hope," laughed the shipping clerk. "She's short a thousand tons yet. Should get away around noon to-morrow."

I was concerned about finances: a hotel ashore would just about run me dry. I knew the unholy muddle there would be aboard; and in spite of the shipping clerk's casual assurance that the steward would be all ready for us I doubted it.

"Those blankety blank fools in the office! Think we've nothing to do but nurse passengers!" I have heard the words often. There is a constant feud between the men at sea and the men in the offices; both sides trying to get their work done in face of opposite conditions they know nothing much about. I had a sympathy with the seamen, having been one myself at various times, and would have spared them the additional curse of our presence aboard if it had not been so essential to save pennies. The trouble with sea folk is that they simply will not let you look after yourself. They insist on your comfort, and on doing all the small things that make for comfort. It is no good going aboard ship and saying: "Don't bother about us." They will bother.

But I soon forgot all this in watching Pat hide her more deadly thoughts at first sight of the 4,000 ton tramp (for it was a tramp, really) that was to be our home for the best part of a month.

We saw the s.s. "Kayeson" all at once. Not even the point of a stubby mast showed as we walked over the cobbled road between the huge dock sheds, and we might have been miles from ships and the sea for all the outward and visible signs. It was hard for Pat to believe that a "liner" could be within a few yards of us. In her imagination a ship wasn't the sort of thing that would squat down out of sight behind a shed.

"Are you sure it's down here?" she asked anxiously.

And a moment later her anxiety had become absolute.

We climbed over a mass of cases bearing the magic words "Monte Video"; stepped carefully over bundles of steel rails; dodged a dozen or so cloth-capped stevedores, and emerged through the wide, sliding doors of the dock shed right upon the s.s. "Kayeson."

"Oh . . ." said Pat.

"Good little ship," I said cheerily.

"Er—um,"; and she climbed doubtfully up the short slant of the gangway and down to the iron main deck.

A mound of cinders sprawled over the deck and banked up to the full height of the ship's side. Steel hawsers twisted and turned to catch the unwary toe; the stiff brown fingers of the derricks sprouted awkwardly over the open holds, and from a small hole in the bulkhead of the bridge deck-house a round little man with a mild expectant face emerged thoughtfully. He had the air of a middle-aged housewife.

"Hello," I greeted. "Good afternoon. All right for us to come aboard?"

The round man immediately became animated. His eyes darted from one to the other of us; a hand stuffed a loose fold of woollen vest down below the belt, and he approached with an expression of anxious apology.

"Oh yes, sir—yes, ma'am. I was expecting you. Welcome aboard. A fearful mess we're in——"

One of his eyes roamed the clutter of the decks and his other watched my wife's face.

"Mustn't take any notice of a tramp in port, ma'am. You won't know us in a day or two."

Pat strove bravely to take no notice.

We followed the old steward into the house, and up a steep flight of stairs and into a cabin like a small white box.

"You'll soon settle down here, ma'am—soon as we're at sea. Won't know yourselves. I've cleaned every inch of this myself. Captain's store-room really," he advised anxiously. "No real accommodation for passengers."

It was a small cabin, but with a port well placed, facing aft—which meant that with reasonable weather it could be open all the time.

"We'll be fine in here," I said. "Don't you bother about us. We're used to the sea."

"... very comfortable," Pat echoed vaguely.

A few more mumbled expressions in regard to our comfort, and the small rotund steward departed. We were the ship's first passengers, and probably its last. It was an event.

Pat knelt up on the cushioned settee and stared out of the port at the deck amidships.

"It's impossible," she announced vaguely. "They can't clean it up. I don't believe all those wires belong anywhere."

"For a sailor," I said severely, "there isn't a muddle at all. Within two hours of sailing we'll be clean as a new pin."

She turned half round from the port and put her hands on my shoulders.

IV. LIVERPOOL

I felt buoyant, as though all my cares had slipped away. Our trunks were stowed and our suit-cases filled the tiny cabin. We had, at last, left cares behind us. And it was fun not to be sailing that night after all; not a bore. It gave me an "invisible man" feeling. We had left England by the front door, and now crept back again to see what it was like

when we were not there. Everyone believed us out of England, and it gave us a special enjoyment to stroll amongst the smoky grime of Liverpool's blackened buildings. We had stolen a day from time. Perhaps that is why we liked Liverpool. We saw an impressive sombre beauty in the massive black buildings, and the entrance to the Mersey tunnel looked odd and naked in its new whiteness.

We wandered happily and aimlessly round Liverpool's frowning squares and along her dingy streets, rattling with tramcars, and bought a dozen postcards on which to say a few last words to people.

We liked Liverpool, and Pat, who had imagined "North country" was a language of the music halls, went about with her ears pricked and was already a traveller in a new land. Late that night we made our way back to the docks, and saw the s.s. "Kayeson" from astern, a fine compact little ship, darkness hiding the muddle of loading and lading her size.

And there was the Skipper to welcome us, a young Devon man with a wide open face and a twinkle in his eyes, and the old steward ready with cocoa for the three of us, which we took together, talking quietly in the soft light from the oil lamps. "'Lectric light to-morrer," said the steward. "Soon as we're off."

We went to our bunks so happy that we'd have been satisfied with naphtha flares, and we still had three pounds, eight shillings and a penny.

V. SAILING

We awoke with the rattle of derricks in our ears, and an acute realization that our cabin door and our porthole had been shut all night. I had done my best with the porthole, and as for the door, until a curtain could be hung an uninterrupted view of us would confront the Captain to and from the bathroom and might embarrass him.

"You'll have to get that window open," said Pat grimly.

"Don't call it a window," I said stuffily. "We're on a ship. It's a porthole."

"I know we're on a ship," Pat agreed.

The old steward appeared with two large mugs of tea and some shaving water, and showed a disposition to chat. It seemed that the weather was ominous. Three ships in distress in the Bay, and the worst storms for fifty years—or a hundred years—a long time anyway, boding no good for us. These considerations seemed to give the old steward a gentle pleasure: "A terrible time" we might have; in fact, we almost certainly, should have. "A terrible time."

"Right in it to-morrer," he advised hopefully; "Mark my words."

We marked his words and Pat dexterously brought the conversation round to immediate needs.

"Do you think you could open the ventilator?" she asked.

"She means the porthole," I explained. "I can't move it."

"I'll lay you can't," agreed the old man. "Been shut for years."

He toddled off clucking to himself, and appeared a few minutes later just as Pat's legs were coming over the edge of the top bunk. Back they went under the clothes while the steward and I performed on the porthole with a meat axe, and prised it open.

"Ah," said Pat. "That's better——"

But she was still in bed. A draught of air that seemed to have come straight from the Arctic dispelled the warmth of the cabin in an instant.

"Wind's aft," advised the steward. "Cold—ain't it?"

"Good to have a window open," said Pat defiantly, and once again we were alone. "Port, if you like," she added.

"It is a port," I said.

We breakfasted alone and then went up to the lower bridge deck to see what was happening. It was bitterly cold. A raw February day with the sky a dull leaden lid over us, and

the water of the docks turgid and dark. Crates and bundles of steel rails were swinging up and in board from the wharf to be lowered with a rush to the gaping holds. It seemed impossible that we could sail that noon, but I knew we should.

So for two hours we paced the lower bridge deck, our feet like blocks of ice, watching the small surly figures of the stevedores handling the cases with their sharp hooks, occasionally mumbling a curse at an awkward mate. Poor, miserable little men, they looked. Agile and strong, but sullen, without any pleasure in their work. Once a bundle of steel rails came loose, and the rails sped like spears to the hold. No one was killed.

Swiftly the work progressed, and the roman-figured boards covered the cavities of the hatches, and the stevedores hunched their shoulders and left us, dismally, not giving us a backward glance as the wharf sheds swallowed them.

We forgot our cold then in the thrill of sailing. It was Pat's first time, and we stood against the starboard rail against the dock side watching every movement fore and aft. Above us on the bridge we could hear the voice of the Captain talking to the pilot. Two small tugs had fussed into the dock and were all set to pull and push.

"Do we go like a train?" said Pat.

"Old fossil—stop gying!" I laughed. "Round that hairpin bend——" I pointed to the blank wall facing us, and the right-angled bend in the dock we would have to negotiate. "It'll be an hour at least before we get into the river."

The harbour-master in his uniform had now appeared, and whistled shrilly through his teeth. A small man in a bowler hat, right aft on the dock, semaphored with his arms.

"O.K., pilot!"

"Let her go!" yelled the pilot from the bridge.

The tugs blared fiercely. We answered them with a deep throaty boom that emerged ultimately from clouds of steam, hissing and spluttering out of the whistle, and we began, almost imperceptibly, to move.

"Just like a train!" said Pat.

At that moment a pale light shone over the wharf sheds and made the leaden sky the colour of dirty copper, and I sneezed twice. This, Pat said, was an omen. I didn't know what sort of an omen it was, but it sounded bad if the words of the steward and others round the pantry door meant anything.

For an hour we crawled slowly through the docks, and all that hour we listened to gloomy forebodings of ships in distress and barometers and what a packet we should strike, and what packets everyone had struck, and in this, fortunately, I could add some experiences of my own.

But Pat remained unmoved. It was not that she thought we were kidding. It was just that she does not worry about "Acts of God" until they happen, and then not much.

The Captain, too, was cheerful when he snatched a bite of food with us.

"Get through between storms, maybe," he said. "Barometer's rising a bit."

And as though to bear him out the sun again—miraculously, for it was quite invisible—spread a pale burnished carpet over the Mersey as we moved in a wide arc out into the stream.

An hour later we felt the lilt and lift of the sea, and left the coast of Wales under a blue sky, with a smooth sea under us.

CHAPTER II

SONG OF THE SEA

I. BAROMETERS

FOR a week we lived in a turmoil. There was no time; no sequence of events. Days and nights lost their boundaries and became a confused increasing uproar in which there was no design.

All through that week the barometer rose steadily. So did the sea. Only Pat and the cabin boy failed to rise. It was the first voyage to sea for both of them, and the sea gave them an initiation ceremony neither will forget. It had done the same with me ten years earlier; a slightly lesser sea and a considerably lesser ship, and fortunately that experience served me well.

"You'll never be sick again," the captain of that ship had said to me.

He was nearly wrong. Life was just a fight through every minute of every twenty-four hours; a fight to stand; a fight to convey odd morsels of food to our mouths; a fight for the men to leave their quarters aft and struggle, clinging to life lines, about such urgent duties as were essential in the intensity of the storm. But for the old steward, deprived of his cabin boy, compelled to juggle with crockery and curry through most of each day, life became a torment only relieved by having me to listen to his tale of woe. There was scarcely time even to think in the bounding body of that ship in which we were like peas in a bladder.

Pat was not actually sick unless she attempted to sit up, yet she could not eat or drink. In all that week only one egg found its way to her stomach and stayed there. She lay

watching the tremendous welter of sea and sky visible through the porthole from her top bunk, and evolved monstrous ideas for a new kind of thriller for amusement parks. She was not afraid. The thing was too large and embracing for fear. It was absurd. Our small ship reared and plunged, rolled, twisted and cavorted in a manner that was altogether impossible, and now and then a sea took us amidships like the clout of a stupendous sledge-hammer, shivering us, so that the ship tensed, rigid yet trembling in every plate. And in those moments it seemed that anything might happen; but always we surged back into the frenzied rearing, plunging and rolling which we came to link with safety.

We marvelled at that ship, and would sometimes wonder out loud, as a great wave thundered across her decks, just what she would do; whether she would shake out of it or not; as if we were not concerned except as spectators.

The real gamble about "tramping" is not the seas you strike, but the Skipper. You cannot get away from him: he cannot get away from you. You may hate each other through twenty or thirty weary days, and there is no escape. And so we were lucky. No storm could stop the twinkle in our Skipper's eye, or his unfailing good humour. Sea humour is usually on the heavy side, but it is always good-natured. I would sooner sail with such a skipper as ours of the s.s. "Kayeson" through days of hurricanes and mountainous seas than with others on a mill pond under glorious sunshine.

It was not until the terrible week was over and the tension relaxed that we realized how anxious we had been, and how great a load of anxiety had fallen on the Captain. There are many wives who will not forget those storms; many sailors who did not live to remember; and if there were by God's chance any shipowners at sea during that week may be they will remember that England did not make her name at sea by building cheap tin cans that cave in if they push against a dock, and will stop sending living human beings to sea in the sort of trash that sometimes carries the British flag to-day.

Gales from the south-west and huge seas towered out of the Western Ocean like the advance guards of a victorious army. Victorious they were. The "Blairgowrie" down with all hands, and we had left the Mersey in her company.

"What's that ship?" Pat had asked, as we steamed buoyantly through that first misleading day of sunshine.

"She's the 'Blairgowrie,'" Sparks had answered. "But she'll be leaving our course after to-night. You'll not see her in the morning."

No one saw her in the morning, anywhere, ever. But that was not enough for the sea's ravenous appetite, and other small ships joined the "Blairgowrie" in disaster.

We grew to love the sturdy "Kayeson"; to feel she was alive and fighting for us. "Thank God we're not heavy loaded!" was on everyone's lips. "We'd be hove-to at best."

There were fifteen ships in distress around us on one awful night, and all we could do was to hold our own. Ahead of us the Royal Mail Liner "Almanzora" was fighting across the Bay at four knots, and we stuck doggedly in her tracks, toiling slowly towards the south.

"This weather must stop another two hundred miles south. It must."

We all said that day after day. We longed for Finisterre. We passed it, and longed for Lisbon. No rest or peace for any soul aboard. The poor miserable cabin boy groaned in his bunk. Pat grew paler and paler in hers, and I developed an overpowering desire for apples, and ate a dozen a day. But we laughed and joked most of the time. Wedged in my lower bunk in the afternoons I read a life of Socrates and another of Rhodes. Work was impossible, and Pat roused herself enough to remark:

"Of course, a cargo ship's the obvious place to write a novel. Days so long. Nothing else to do . . . Grr!" She growled. "You're an old swindler, Tommy."

Physically, writing was impossible, and mentally the terrific

threat of the seas was too ever present for detachment. But I was not losing time. I had reckoned on twenty-two days of work, and the progress of that whole week was barely two days.

At night in the Skipper's cabin, the doors wide open so that Pat could feel she was with us, if she could feel anything, we played the portable gramophone (the needle clings to the record through almost anything), and there was one night while the Skipper's favourite record was blaring—"Captain Brown—he played the ukulele as the ship went down!" and that was somewhere in the "Bay of Biscay—O!"—that "Sparks" staggered up the steep companion to report the wind at eighty miles an hour, and a great batch of distress signals coming in from ships behind us in the Bay, in the seas we had just quitted.

Each night the Skipper looked into our cabin with a cheery word. "We'll be out of this to-morrow, Mrs. Thompson."

At the end of the week, when we should have been down past Madeira soaking in sunshine, we were still somewhere off Lisbon in the same towering green waste of sea that had almost become normality.

Before the end of it I tried to work. Three times in five minutes I had to hang on to avoid being flung across the saloon. It was hopeless. Nothing was secure. Doors burst open; racks unloosed their holdings of plates; cups jumped from hooks; and a cupboard in the captain's cabin trundled a dozen of good beer over the deck where they rolled and clattered like clucking ducks while we grovelled after them.

It was about the fifth day that Pat began to "think" food, and it was on this day that the egg stayed down. But she had more pleasure from "thinking" food than from trying to eat it. I was not eating too well myself, and I think the Mate was the only man aboard who really put his tucker away with a will. Not even in the Australian bush have I seen such a breakfast eater. Porridge, chops and potatoes, curry and rice merely made way for half a dozen thick slices of bread and

marmalade, and took the edge of the hunger he acquired in his four to eight watch. He was not a big man.

There was no definite end to that week. There was a day when the Skipper decided to alter our course, and turn her down further south for the Grand Canary and miss Madeira. That meant bringing the huge seas more abeam instead of on the starboard bow, but it turned out to be a good move. We rolled more—if that was possible—but we pitched less and began to make good headway.

The Skipper looked in on us that evening. "We're doing nine knots," he said. "That'll bring us into the permanent summer belt some time to-morrow, and we'll be out of it." And as an afterthought, he added: "Barometer's still rising!"

II. OUT OF IT

There was no miracle of transformation. The sun did not burst in all its splendour upon us and light the ship and all the ocean. It did not truly appear, but it was there behind the paler grey of the sky; clearly there. And the sea had eased.

We felt it first just before we slept; a distinct slackening in the stress and strain; a falling off in the whine and howl of the gale. And by morning time had begun to matter. There had been no night; no day. The seas and life had gone on and on.

The great fierce swell out of the western ocean was still with us; it careered in wild grey green walls after us from the north-east, taking us just aft of amidships, lifting us high and rolling on in a vague flutter of foam; but its anger was spent.

The wind still blew steady and strong but it, too, had lost its fierceness.

Pat, rocky on her legs, climbed weakly from her bunk and struggled to the lower bridge deck, sheltering in the lee of the house, where she sat drinking in new strength. And at lunch she ate. It was her only food for seven days, except the one egg.

All that afternoon the sun was faint silver on the grey water, invisible itself behind clouds, but there it was sure enough.

"Does the sea ever get smoother than this?" Pat asked anxiously.

The Skipper's laughter answered her better than words.

"Better!" said the Skipper. (The seas were even then bridge high at times, and the wind between eight and nine on the Beaufort scale.) "If we were going into this instead of with it you'd know it."

She was relieved.

"It's a good job there isn't a back door way out," said the Skipper half humorously. "A good many of us would have left by it before now. I for one. Once you're in a ship you're in it."

"It really does get as smooth as a mill pond," I assured Pat, but that was beyond her imagination just then.

By evening she had new colour in her cheeks and was already stronger, clinging to the bridge rail and watching an army of porpoises careering madly into the waves. It was sheer delight to watch the ill-named sleek, streamlined speedsters in absolute zest around us, grey silvered projectiles shooting out of the wave-tops and diving like arrows to the huge curving troughs twenty or thirty feet beneath. Sometimes it seemed that the great waves caught them unawares, leaving them high and dry, poised in mid air, one thousand pounds of grace and strength. The green seas around us were shot with their dark bodies, and we could have watched for hours, but it seemed they had a tryst away east of us and we saw the splash of the last of them disappear.

There was a different feeling in the ship that evening. A steady throb in the engine; ease in all her plates; ease in all our faces, and in Pat's starving belly.

We began social life that evening, meeting the officers properly, and taking an interest in life.

"Ten and a half knots now, Mrs. Thompson," said the Mate at tea (which consisted of salt fish, cold meats, potatoes,

fruit, bread, butter, jam and cheese), "We'll be south of Madeira to-morrow and Teneriffe right ahead. That's about all the land you're likely to see until we sight Polonio."

The approbation seemed reasonably mutual. They were a young crowd, amazingly interested in everything, and not yet rigid in sea ways. We told them we were authors, with some misgivings, but the Mate had had to do with authors before and had not been touched for any money. This surprised us until we learned that the author bloke in question wrote for the *Saturday Evening Post*. We wished we did.

Within a week we were friendly with every man aboard, and the cabin boy, a tall pallid wisp of a lad, was back in the pantry making an effort at his work again and giving the old steward more leisure and the blessing of someone to curse. For there would be precious little fun in being steward if there were not a cabin boy to receive the curses that had fallen on his own head in early days. But cursing and ship life—along with everything else in the pasts of our fathers—aren't what they were. The cabin boy could at least thank his God for that.

The great character aboard the ship (the Captain was only in the early thirties, and you cannot really be a "character" before sixty) was the Chief Engineer.

"The Chief's a real tough Hinney," said the Skipper. "Cracked many a jaw in his time. A darn good pal to have around——" There was just a faint hint of anxiety in this statement, which the Skipper translated to my private ear—"Chief might loose off an odd word or two now and again ——"

I reassured him about that. Sailors are so extraordinarily courteous towards women that not even a damn must pass their lips. In all that trip we did not hear a curse, and the Chief upheld the honour of the service so that the Skipper passed from a state of acute nervous agitation to child-like wonder and finally to honest admiration.

It was on my assurance that an odd curse now and then would not offend Pat that our nap school was inaugurated,

and every night of the trip the four of us, Skipper, Chief, Pat and I, sat round the small table in the Skipper's box of a sitting-room gambling for halfpennies. Pat showed surprising talent and an ever growing balance of halfpennies, mostly mine.

Knowing the Skipper's fear of the Chief's alleged weakness (Pat was in blissful ignorance of the torrents of real sea language that might at any moment assail her ears) those first games were a source of piquant amusement. From time to time the Skipper's grey eyes would peer up from his cards and shoot anxious glances towards the old Chief, huddled over the cards grasped in a large gnarled hand. Presently there would be a rumbling noise from the Chief, developing into a kind of hiss, puffing his lips and trembling the fringe of his straggly grey moustache.

With that the Captain would relax and sigh, and I knew the danger had passed.

He was a grand old-timer that Chief. The coal dust of years had eaten into the tough skin of his face and hands, and his eyes were set in deep hollows under the eaves of his bristling grey brows. There was the strength of old iron in him; tried strength; and his shoulders had the broad slope of power under his old blue tunic.

But he was the very devil of a nap player, losing all the time, scratching his grey mat of hair with a crooked finger, daring nothing. Slowly the harsh rumble would grow in him and materialize in a gruff, "I'll try three!"

Then he would proceed to take all five tricks; his eyes darting from one to other of us; a final hiss. . . .

"It weren't a nap hand. Not even a cert three. Had me doubts about chancin' it!"

Fearful of opening the flood gates we forebore to laugh. Once or twice to the Captain's terror I did venture a mild: "That was a nap all the way, Chief!"

But the Chief would only shake his head. "For you young 'uns, may be. I c'ud only see three there."

Finally the Skipper would look at the clock and we would play for the last kitty.

“Reach down those glasses, Chief.”

And we would sink a quartette of night-caps and go happily to our bunks.

III. INTO OUR STRIDE

It was ten days before we were properly into our stride, the log reeling off 275 miles a day, and the Chief and Skipper on good terms with their world. It was not until the tenth day that a real wide rift appeared in the grey blanket of the sky, and the sun poured through, drenching us in warmth. Two thousand miles of the world had been under a steady sunless shroud.

Sitting down to meals was no longer like riding the swaying back of a camel at full gallop, scenting water. We did not have to “scent” water anyway. In it had come, smashing through ill-clamped ports, rearing bridge high and descending with a vast unmannerly hiss through the engine-room skylights on the amidships boat deck, and salting the tops of the Chief’s beloved cylinders with a thick white rime.

The Skipper altered course a few points west to try to gain a day or two by making the most of the currents, and in the late afternoon of that day we saw Teneriffe. It was a huge disappointment to Pat. I had often told her how land grows slowly out of the sea, changing shape and colour with every moment, but the sun was not properly on our side, and we were within twenty miles before the loom was visible to a seaman’s eyes, and indistinguishable—unless one knew—from a cloud bank.

It was evening before we were abeam the northernmost point; huge black clouds surging angrily, swathing the peak, obliterating it, and casting a deep dusky haze over the tall cliffs. Teneriffe was a great dark purple rock in the midst of the Atlantic, and far away to eastward we could just make out

the shape of Grand Canary. Only the yellow winking lights of Teneriffe—it was dark before we had left the island behind—Pat found companionable.

But that day was different. It marked the beginning of the happiest two weeks I have lived. The Skipper was a fine companion, full of tales of Devon fishermen and of his sailing days as a youth, still not far behind. He had been a daring lad, with a real *feel* for a sailing boat, and he was greatly proud of his native village of Beer with its cottages under the only white cliffs in Devon.

He had, too, a passion for telling fortunes with the cards, and had many packs for this purpose. In the evenings, before the Chief came along to join the nap school, we would sit solemnly “just having a look at the cards.” We had several methods of arrangement, and it was a sorry night if they all boded evil. Mostly the Skipper would say judicially: “Er—mm—not *too* good. But I reckon you’ll just about get your wish.”

And Pat’s laughter only made us shake our heads sagely. We knew.

The Chief was a great man with stories; some of them of the most fantastic kind, yet patently true. Most of them began or ended at a pub, and there was a story about a goat the Chief had led home to his wife one night, that let the laughter out of us until we ached.

Pat was quickly a good friend of the whole company. The young officers lost their nervousness when she joined them with a pail on the foredeck and did a bit of “dobeying,” though there were one or two garments that we did not hang on the line between the derricks because after consultation with the Skipper we thought it wouldn’t be quite fair.

Most of all Pat excelled at knots. There was not a knot she couldn’t tie, and she shared with the Skipper the honour of being the only “man” aboard to master a four stranded turk’s head. She learned to pick up a couple of half hitches on the run, and tomfool’s knots were simply tomfool’s

knots. All this came in useful. She made a good job of some cross pointing to join up a new log line while the Captain got on with his darning and I with my book.

Of excitement there was none, and we did not feel the loss of it. We had left the past behind and had not yet encountered the future. We were marooned in a world of peace, and new health and strength crept into us. Pat was a young girl again, and I began to recognize myself and wonder where I had been all these years.

We found joy in everything, and a thrill in watching the sinister fin of a shark cruising alongside most of one afternoon. Later the shark went aft and relieved us of the log. Nothing, I should think, could have relieved him of indigestion.

There was always something to watch; the clouds of flying-fish skimming the water like silver spears, their gauzy wings drying swiftly under the hot sun and dropping them back to swim again. It was good to watch them darting away from the bows, twisting and turning wildly before resorting to flight. Pat's joy in all these new things imparted itself to the Skipper and me, and we played games of "Goose spotting." The Skipper invariably beat us at this, recognizing at a good hundred yards the bubble-like jelly of the Portuguese men-o'-war with their shell-like sails set, sailing right into the wind as no other craft can without tacking.

And there were other things to spot. One day I noticed a single crate floating in the water. We decided it was full of something, probably oranges.

"We had a Mate," said the Skipper in the dry way he had, "a rare stickler he was. I remember once looking up a log entry of his—it was hereabouts—'Passed one orange box bound north.'"

That story has in it, if you know the sea, something truly expressing life in a small cargo ship.

It was lucky that Mate was not aboard with us then, for we counted one hundred and thirty-two boxes before we tired of

the game. Someone had lost a deck cargo and Lloyd's would do the worrying about that.

That night the Skipper said, half doubtfully: "If you don't mind my saying so"—and he cleared his throat a bit—"Mrs. Thompson looks about eighteen—twenty years seem to have dropped off you folk since that night you came aboard."

We did not mind his saying so. We just wished it could go on for ever like that. I think it was more than five years since I had known my head clear of worry for more than an odd hour, and perhaps Pat was the same. Life had just been a procession of mistakes and troubles, and everything we had done had gone wrong. We felt we were repairing, to begin again.

IV. SEA CALENDAR

We were making our courses within a degree each day and getting along at such a fine pace that we had a good chance of picking up the days we had lost. We had set the course a good deal more eastward than usual, trying to benefit by every current that might be running, and leaving Fernando far away to the west.

The Chief dared not burn more than thirty-two tons per day of the wretched dust called coal with which we were bunkered, to give us an extra knot. We were "all out," and navigation alone could bring us into Monte Video up to time.

The work of the ship was now going ahead normally; the decks soaked in thick black oil so that Pat went on her face as she stepped from the saloon and ruined a white suit as well as making a hole in her chin. This thick black oil with which many iron-decked tramps are treated is an abomination. You will never find a skipper or mate who thinks the stuff is any good for preserving decks. Shore superintendents get ideas into their heads and sailors have to apply them. All strips of carpet are quickly ruined; all wooden decking badly stained. It's just one of those things.

No sooner had we finished cursing the black ooze that made

the decks forbidden ground than we smelled fire. Pat and the Skipper indulged snuffling of the nostrils for half an hour during our nap school until the old Chief and I began to think they were working out a sharpening code. Finally they voiced their fears with a chorus:

“ I think I smell fire——”

The fire turned out to be nothing more than the usual affair in the bunkers, and we had a good deal of fun pulling the leg of the strange black figure that emerged at intervals from the starboard bunker hatch during the next day or two and wiped sweat from a blackened forehead with an equally blackened arm. It was just possible to detect a grin on the face of this apparition.

“ Hello, Chief—that you? Been working? ”

“ Aw, I ain’t working,” the Chief would say. “ Got a nice soft bed down here.”

“ Oh! Is that what that black dust is for? ”

As soon as the fire had yielded to the Chief’s persuasion we took Pat for a tour of the engine-room and stokehold. She was a bit worried about going into the stokehold all fresh and rosy as a spring morning but we reassured her. She lost one of her illusions that day. Instead of the naked backs corded with muscles in the harsh glare of the great fires; the rhythmic swing of shovels and the sweat of men with chests like great apes—in the Eugene O’Neill manner—there were two miserable little Arabs, one alone firing, not even stripped to the waist.

Pat felt that she had been cheated and the “ Kayeson ” was not a “ proper ” ship. Then we walked along the shaft chamber to the cavern under the propeller, but that was too much like being in a submarine and Pat was glad to smell salt sea air on the decks again.

She was really disappointed in the small Arab firemen, exceedingly efficient and very easy to manage.

“ They allus gives me steam when I wants it,” said the Chief. “ I got no fault with ’em.”

They were nice little chaps, keeping to themselves, doing their worshipping quietly and arranging the work amongst themselves. If one of their number was ill the others would do his job. No one would hear about it. And they were cheap. That is one of the sore points of the Seamen's Union, and they handle it quite subtly. I read one of their pamphlets calling on the men to fight for equal pay for their "Arab brothers." Then we will have them kicked out. But the pamphlet did not say that part of it.

Well, the "Kayeson" was a happy ship, and that is rare enough in these days. The food was good; immeasurably better, of course, than it need have been. I say "of course" because the official ration of milk per man is a tin of Nestlé's milk every three weeks, for example, and that is so clearly wicked that even the worst owners could not get away with it without mutiny.

As for us, we fed like feudal barons. The Skipper, thoughtful always, had taken aboard some poultry for us, and "sea gull" figured on the hash bill two or three times a week. This sea gull did not really interfere with the sea calendar of food because the "real" food was served too if anyone wanted it.

On a tramp you always know what day it is by the food. It never varies. "Sea gull" or pork on Sunday; steak and kidney pie on Monday; roast lamb on Tuesday, and haricot mutton on Wednesday. Lambs grow into sheep faster aboard a tramp than on any pasture.

I forget our actual calendar all through, but if you said to the steward "What day is it?" he would probably answer "Steak and kidney pie," meaning steak pie, meaning Monday. A change of chief steward for any reason, and a consequent change of hash bills, would probably bring a ship into port on the wrong day.

We had precious little doldrums in any sense of the word that voyage. One day of sudden fierce showers and flat calms we picked up the south-east Trades and were away

"down hill" south of the Line. For the first time we could wander and laze in comfort on the fore deck and foc's'le-head without being covered with cinders.

The "Kayeson" had short "death trap" wells, and the men lived aft where the funnel now belched its torrent of grime.

I do not know how I did any work, that week. There was always something to look at, and the temptation just to laze and look was terrific.

V. SONG OF THE SEA

There was always something to watch if one's mind was right. Our minds were right during those wonderful two weeks of peace. On land we could have watched grass grow, trees bud, creepers creep, and wondered. As it was we watched the sea and the sky. The sea and sky were enough; they were profuse; they were madly generous. For hours we would sit up in the bows watching the movement of the brown speckled spawn that lay thick over the sea. It was like a great carpet made up of life particles, a living carpet, and our sharp stem cut into it and rolled it up, drawing it into strange designs as we ploughed through it, slaughtering life cells in millions, I suppose.

But there were thousands of acres of the stuff; enough to satisfy the huge maws of the numerous whales that patrol those seas and still to leave an immense profusion of life. That brown speckled fish spawn thick over the ocean was like seeds flung down in handfuls over a field. There was not room for it all to grow: it could not have been meant to grow. The prodigality was startling. Life seemed the cheapest and chanciest of all things.

On that small silent ship we were at last free from distractions, from "news," and were able to absorb. It was rest. The sky at evening seemed to us like a story of which we must not miss a word. I remember one evening when I walked onto the lower bridge deck, and the sky was like the inside of

a shell delicately veined and scarred with a filigree of fine yellow gold. It seemed to me so extravagantly beautiful that I ran in to fetch Pat but in that minute before I found her the sky was lost. *That* sky. Second by second the scarves and pale wafers reflected new wealths of colour, became at last dusky red gold, and faded imperceptibly into night. Just a story. It all seems unimportant but it seemed to us then the only thing that mattered. The sea was getting hold of us. It has always got hold of me. I always live best and work best at sea, and I was beginning to know the life; beginning to get inside the men who live their lives upon it; the men to whom the seas are the world, and lands are "interiors," without interest. There were not more than half a dozen men aboard that ship—or any ship—who would have bothered to go ashore in Shanghai, say, or Vladivostok, except to stretch their legs and have a drink in changed surroundings. They would not have wondered what went on in the countries behind those ports—in the "interior," as they say. They would not anchor in the mouth of a river and wonder where that river came from, how the strange peoples on its banks lived or in what great mountains it rose.

It was not until that sea mind ceased to exasperate me that I began to know seamen. I had done fifty thousand miles in tramp steamers but that was not really to begin to know these people: I had scarcely begun to understand them.

And if the land does not excite any interest in a seaman, neither does the sea. Most of us, landsmen and seamen, have lost our zest for ordinary things, the things that surround us day by day. There was an old steward in a ship I was on. One fine day, with the sky pure blue and the sea calm, the whistle howled suddenly the alarm of fire and seamen yelled: "Fire!" as the old steward came to the door of his pantry. "You've got a fine day for it," he said, and went on preparing afternoon tea.

The Mate on the "Kayeson" thought us very simple folk. And we were. We would just sit watching. Sparklets of sea

smashing over the forward well decks; spray like the icing of a wedding cake; a gay south-easter running a sea on the port bow, a light sea, a wild happy sea without malice in the creaming rustle of its wave tops. And the colour—blue, dark and light; sapphires couldn't have touched it; and again, emeralds; the brilliance of emerald merging to grey green.

So she goes till evening, racing south of Fernando. The sun lowers, unfurling a carpet of bronze from the ends of the sea to the steel hull. The sky becomes red gold, light gold, pale as lilies. It cheats you. A look eastward reveals the surface of the sea pure purple, and again westward the copper carpet has changed to bronze—the veins of the sea like a vibrant fabric; the strength of it; the lilt of it, under that bronze spread. Bronze—there *is* bronze in it—its pure silver picking out the sea in tiny gleaming pinnacles. Sheer silver shimmering like a diamond gown.

The sun has gone and the moon has come. Stars are filling the sky, faint, so faint, light-years away. But nonsense. Here they are, just above, within reach, the stubby masts pricking them; the Milky Way like the wake of a ghost ship across the sky.

We're running south, the south-east Trades raking us, down through the Mud Wells to Polonio, to Monte Video. We shall be there by morning. Pat has picked up the light. She saw it first; a small wink thirty miles away. "Come along. Don't break up the nap school. It's our last night."

"Reach down those glasses, Chief."

"Here's all you wish yourselves!"

"Thanks, Skipper. A grand trip. Sorry it's over——"

We'll be down past Lobos soon, the seals shining silver grey under the full moon, but keep clear of Lobos! Full moon's a bad time to arrive in the Plate—so say sailors—but no matter, we've made it, only seventeen hours late. Twenty-four days seventeen hours.

Land to-morrow! Monte Video!

CHAPTER III

MONTE VIDEO

I FOUND myself awake suddenly, listening. It was pitch dark, and there was a strange silence, and lack of movement. It was perhaps twenty seconds before I realized that the engines had stopped; that we were still; and I crawled out of my bunk to the light switch.

Pat opened one eye and made a vague grumbling noise through a mouthful of blanket.

"Half-past four," I said, finding my watch.

She sat up with a jolt; stared out of the port into pitch blackness. "We've stopped. Are we there?"

"Sling on a dressing gown, let's go on deck."

The ship was rolling gently, the water lapping against her. A small yellow light and pin pricks of red and green were swaying towards us. On the foredeck the Mate and a seaman had the Jacob's ladder over the side, and in a moment or two a soft hat appeared, and the head of a short, thick-set man. He was puffing and blowing as he came aboard. "Goo' mo'nin'," he said.

A moment later he whisked past us on his way to the bridge and the telegraph rang to the engine-room.

Ahead of us Monte Video was a sparkling line of lights drawn across the night—like footlights with the curtain still down behind them. And as we gathered speed and steamed towards them the line bowed almost imperceptibly to a gentle curve; grew to a vast semicircle with the powerful light of the Cerro winking at us like a giant's eye.

We seemed to move so slowly through the inky water, and all at once the moon staggered out from behind a heavy bank of cloud and showed vague shapes behind the wide scarf of lights.

So we watched Monte Video growing grey out of the grey dawn, a phantom city, and away westward to the mound of the Cerro there was a pearl-grey light like the inside of an oyster shell. With every second of our approach the regularity of that first sparkling line fell into irregularity. Buildings grew, ghostly. Against the deep blue back-drop of the sky, in which the stars slowly climbed higher, receding to the first faint amber of the rising sun, spires and domes and towers stood out sharp as cardboard cut-outs, dusky grey against the fringe of amber that bordered the fading night.

We were silent for a long time, watching the magic of the city growing before our eyes.

We might have arrived at Monte Video ten thousand times and not have seen it in just that light, the sun slowly pushing out the moon and building the city for us. Colour and design vied in mad delight too swift to trace. Pearl grey, dusky grey, amber, then blue, the blue of slates with noon sunlight on them; powder blue, and then slowly white, pure white. At last the chaotic jumble of a city; high buildings and low; odd streets, everything of all shapes and sizes that had been, scarcely an hour earlier, a thing of perfect order, a simple curve of lights, intriguing, hiding Monte Video.

The Mate clumped up to our deck and paused a moment on his way to the bridge.

"That Yank we saw last night just beat us to it. We'd 've been in a couple of hours but for him."

So we owed our vision to the Yankee steamer that was already alongside the new wharves of the inner harbour.

Pat went back to bed and I foraged for a couple of mugs of tea and some shaving-water. She raised her head from the pillow to observe, amused, as I dodged to the porthole every two seconds: "Anyone 'd think I was the old traveller and you on your first voyage."

A head appeared round the door curtain and retreated, apologizing profusely, to reappear smiling broadly.

"Buenos dias, señor—El Doctor——"

" Ah—Buenos dias," I said. " I'm shaving as you see."

" Your wife is with you? " said the Doctor discreetly.

Pat, hearing the word *señora*, popped up from the sheets. The Doctor gurgled happily; Pat smiled; I laughed. We nodded and beamed at each other.

" Would you like——" I began.

But the Doctor was already a large smiling face crowned with a blue beret receding behind the door curtain.

" Muchisimas gracias, señor—Buenas dias, señor—señora ——"

" Who was that? " Pat asked as though she had come suddenly into a mad world.

" The Doctor," I said severely. " You must be very polite to these doctors."

" Is he going to examine me? "

" He *has* examined you," I said. " You are well—any fool could see that. We are both well."

We breakfasted alone in about two and a half minutes. Already hatch covers were off and the decks were alive with strange men in striped trousers buttoned at the ankles, and black cummerbunds round their waists. All were gesticulating wildly; some violently. A man in a straw hat was barking a torrent of language that sounded terrific, worthy of Mussolini. I couldn't quite get the sound of it; probably such language would need a toilsome apprenticeship.

A lighter was coming up alongside; donkey engines were fussing; derricks waving oddly.

A cigarette drooped from every mouth. A huge negro stuck his hook into a case labelled " whisky " and grinned like an earthquake. A small man ceased winding the black strip of cloth at his waist to shy a hunk of straw at another stevedore similarly employed. It was as though a gang of overgrown schoolboys in fancy dress had come aboard, and the man in the straw hat bawling his torrent of words was the unfortunate professor striving for order.

Presently the derricks were swinging cases up out of the

holds onto the deck, and the new German-made electric cranes on the wharves were picking up the cases in bunches and dumping them into trucks. Here and there a case trickled a thin amber stream, and the stevedores struggled underneath as the damaged cases swung aloft, and lolled out their tongues hopefully. The head packer on the wharf must have drunk a full pint. The crane man had to drop the cases within a foot or two of the trucks and wait for the foreman's signal before lowering the last bit. This signal was delayed frequently while the foreman lapped his fill.

But the work went ahead fast. Heavy steel rails and some large bales were going over the side into the lighter where three of the oddest human beings stowed them boisterously. The leader of these lightermen was a colossus—the sort of man, heavy as an elephant and with a back like a wall, you sometimes see on the waterfront in an American film. One of his companions was tall and lithe, the other fat, bustling and short.

As the bales poised within a foot or two of the lighter's open hold these three ill-assorted beings dashed at them furiously so as to swing them as far under the coaming as possible before they touched deck. The little man invariably picked himself from the dark recesses where the heavy bales flicked him as they swung.

In England, we should have said the little man was superfluous, but in Monte Video he was the life of the party. Everything went ahead in a spirit of gaiety, except for a gentleman handling one of the donkey-engines. His dark suit was well pressed; his hands encased in grey suede gloves; his straw hat at a slight angle over his severe, unsmiling face.

It was ten o'clock before the Skipper was ready to go ashore and we piled into an open tourer taxi driven by a double of Wallace Beery. It was not a good taxi—as taxi's go in South America—but its owner driver could not have taken more pride in it had it been a new Bentley. As we walked down the gang-plank he was putting the finishing touches to the

back seats, flicking them lovingly with a feather duster that looked absurdly small in his great ham-like hand. He saluted gravely with this implement as he held the door for Pat, and flourished it gently around the radiator before stuffing it shaft first into his hip pocket so that the feathers stuck up under his coat.

The shipping clerk, who had arrived in this vehicle with its prodigious owner, was already apologizing profusely in English, but we did not want apologies. It was grand to be ashore in a foreign land, and we should have been happy in a wheelbarrow. Besides, the ancient Dodge, of which our driver was so proud, had life in it yet.

We dropped the Skipper and the clerk at the agent's office and kept the taxi to ourselves. I had a five-peso note and nothing more; but I waved my hand in a broad gesture including most of Monte Video, and said: *Vamos!* as though time, money and distance meant nothing to me.

Off we went, our driver gesticulating and talking volubly. He was as proud of Monte Video as of his motor-car. The huge Palazzo Salgro, built, they say, by a Scottish cobbler as a kind of monument to his own success, was an edifice that our driver would willingly have dusted with his absurd bunch of feathers from street level to the pinnacle of its tower high above the twenty-fourth storey.

For half an hour we twisted and turned along narrow streets through wide plazas brilliant with flowers, and broad avenidas. Then we drove out of the town by the sea front towards Currasco.

Our driver maintained a ceaseless flow of words and there were one or two exciting moments when it seemed that we might hit a tram or finish up in a shop window. Out of the town we breathed more freely, but not for long. With a wave of the hand the driver indicated the golf course.

"Cancha de golf!" he roared. "The señor plays golf?"

And like a fool I said I did and asked the driver whether he too enjoyed a game.

"Ha!" he boomed, and swung both arms in a great half circle. "Whoo oosh!"

The steering-wheel did its best. The road at that point is wide and the car following us just managed to save itself as it began to pass on the inside. We needed all the width the road could give us.

"That was your fault," said Pat. "You encouraged him. You mustn't say things that he can do the actions to—I wish I knew what you were talking about."

It was hard not to encourage him. He was a delightful man. We discussed the new flats, the new hotels going up along the promenade—whether they would pay and what sort of people would stay in them. We admired the new Spanish villas that sat snugly in neat gardens. We envied the bathers, and nearly had another accident because I forgot the Spanish for "shark" and we again resorted to demonstration.

At last we turned into a cool garden of palms, and there was a hotel with a broad terrace dotted with small wicker tables, and I thought irresistibly of coffee. So Pat had her first cup of real coffee—for you can only get real coffee in South America—and ate fresh fig jam with new rolls and rich yellow butter. Food!—we had almost forgotten that there could be delight in food. Meanwhile our driver wandered slowly round his machine, eyeing it from various angles, applying his duster here and there like a painter putting the finishing touches to some masterpiece.

At one o'clock we rejoined the Skipper, having with difficulty persuaded our driver that we had not engaged him for life but that nevertheless we liked him personally and there was no malice whatever in the fact that we did not intend to retain him during lunch "just in case we should need him afterwards."

The Skipper's ideas of food in South America began and ended with "fiambres," but Pat and I ate langostinos as large as small lobsters, and then strolled slowly back to the ship through the old narrow streets.

But the ship seemed no longer our home. We had almost done with her, and she with us. The rest cure was nearly over, and business about to begin. From to-morrow the future was the unknown. The Skipper was filled with forebodings about us—"Surely you must know where you're going, what you're going to do."

But we didn't. Twenty pounds was all we could hope for in the way of cash for at least five weeks, and we should not get far on that. On the other hand we were going far, and that was to-morrow's business. I don't think Pat felt any qualms.

"Oh, we'll be all right," she soothed the Skipper, and it sounded as if we should by the way she said it. I was sure, too. I had not felt so ready for living in nearly ten years, and was boiling to begin.

At five in the evening we steamed out of the inner harbour on the last lap of a hundred and twenty miles across the River Plate. And as we sailed due west the sun died, falling below the horizon in a great shroud of fire. Above the dark blue of the water the sky was rimmed blood red as though the blood of the sun welled up brimming over the edge of the world.

There was the black speck of a ship ahead, visible in the fierce dying stain.

"That's the Yank," said the Skipper. "We haven't a hope of catching him. Hope he doesn't make us late in the morning."

Behind us the moon had come up swiftly, and we looked back along a silver pathway to the distant lights of Monte Video, no longer a mystery. The mystery was ahead.

CHAPTER IV

ARGENTINE

I. BUENOS AIRES

THE Yank did not hold us up, but it was mid afternoon before we emerged from luxurious hot baths (salt and cold ones had served us at sea) and drank tea in the lounge of the old Phoenix in San Martin, with the rod-like ageless form of "Don Vittorio" hovering over us.

I found it gratifying to have Victor welcoming me by name in his slight cosmopolitan accent—he speaks a dozen languages:

"Ah—you have the señora now," said Victor with a suspicion of a sigh. "That is very good. Ten years is a short time, but much can happen."

Much had happened to me, and, in a way, to Victor, but the exciting events of Victor's incredible life in every country of the world, in almost every capacity from cook aboard a Chinese junk to diplomat, were well in the past. Victor had become the proprietor of the Phoenix. He told me the story in his clipped phrases, with occasional slight gestures of his well-kept hands. There is an astonishing restraint about Victor.

The Phoenix had fallen on bad times since I had last owed it money (and paid it). It had been put up for sale by auction.

"You remember my colleagues, Meester Thompson—the hall porter? The chef?"

"Well, Victor."

"We three had saved a little money. We bought our hotel. We had worked for it so long."

And these three musketeers had continued in their old jobs. The hall-porter-proprietor still donned his uniform and met

the boats and trains; the chef-proprietor still ruled the scullions and the kitchen from beneath his billowing hat. And Victor still sleuthed around the restaurant putting the tips of his fingers together in the way he had, and translating the wishes of his English guests into Spanish.

Occasionally someone would appear out of Victor's indescribable past, and there would be the devil of a jamboree—not in the blameless atmosphere of the Phoenix, of course. I believe Victor to be the perfect major-domo.

"You are a writer, Meester Thompson. That is a leetle story—yes?" said Victor.

"Definitely yes, Victor."

This little interlude settled Pat in comfortably. It seemed to give her confidence that we should manage everything; that we really were on our way to Paraguay and should be leaving in a day or two.

"The last time I was here," I told her, "I was broke to the wide—hadn't an idea how I was to pay the bill."

"You haven't changed as much as the hotel then," said Pat.

I had hoped that the agent would have brought my twenty pounds down to the ship when we docked. But he hadn't. Our £3 8s. 1d. had gone towards the old steward's deserts, and in the end the Skipper had lent me thirty dollars.* Without that we should not have been able to get our luggage ashore and hire an expreso to take it up to the Phoenix.

The Customs had chalked it through without a word. My passport was quite impressive, unique in fact; special Bolivian and Paraguayan visas facing each other. That meant we were important.

We had emerged finally with a five-dollar bill, and we confidently expected to-morrow would see the arrival of our credit—380 dollars at the free exchange of 19 to the pound. Not exactly a fortune, but it would have to do. The machinery would have to click.

* The Argentine peso is usually called "Dollar," much to the annoyance of U.S. citizens who reckon a dollar a real piece of money that shouldn't be muddled with other stuff.

We wandered along Florida in the hour between five to six in the evening, rubbing shoulders with the multitude; that strange multitude of Argentine young men ogling the sombrely dressed, dark-eyed girls walking demurely with their parental escorts. The women are perfectly turned out, but nearly always in black. It is a tragedy. Some of them are beautiful in a dark lurid kind of way.

I was a bit scared of taking Pat along Florida. The shops are altogether too good, and I warned her that even a packet of hair-pins was out of the question. We had better indulge in window shopping. In this way we spent the best part of 100,000 dollars in the space of four squares, and were well pleased with ourselves.

"Hot" music hideously distorted blared from the Boston bar. Pancho's still had its "ladies orchestra," and the best cocktails in Buenos Aires, with pea nuts, olives, ham sandwiches and crisps thrown in. The Richmond still looked severely expensive (though it isn't). Florida, one way and another, is not the street to promenade with a wife and five dollars.

We meandered back along the narrowness of San Martin.

"Don't you like this Buenos Aires?" I said.

Things were beginning to wake up inside me. Life was not just a road, it was an adventure. "Think of it, old lady, we don't know what'll happen next."

Pat smiled, "I wish we had a million dollars!" she said. "This is just like Paris or London or any big city. It hasn't the foreign feeling of Monte."

That's true. The Argentines are not made to a pattern yet. But I like B.A. It is so proud of itself. Its people are all excitable; all going somewhere; all liable to go a bit mad and surge into the Plaza Congresso for no reason except that they want to shout "Viva Justo!" or Viva anything that comes into their heads.

In Monte Video you feel they won't do that kind of thing. In B.A. they are always excited about something. Just then it was the Chaco war and the victories of the Paraguayans,

You might have thought, hearing odd scraps of conversation, that everyone had a young brother named "Paraguayo."

We walked back to the hotel, our plans all cut and dried. To-morrow I would get busy; but to-night we would just have a couple of quiet cocktails in the hotel and an equally quiet dinner with a bottle of trapiche*. And so to bed and a good night's rest before going into the fray.

Victor greeted us with one of his special inclinations of the body as we came into the lounge. A young man with a certain well-fedness filling out his dark lounge suit approached a step or two and bowed slightly. Other men in the background seemed to be minor characters in the scene. The well-fed young man advanced.

"Señor Thompson—*La Nacion*——"

It was upon us. An avalanche.

"Señor Thompson—*La Critica*——"

I was "our newspaper colleague." I was a "famous author." I had a "mission." That was disturbing.

One of these charming "colleagues" of mine had flown straight from interviewing Lord Beaverbrook in Rio de Janeiro to interview me.

I realized that the Skipper would expect me to behave with gravity. I did. I discussed a mission—apparently that was a thing I had to have. My mission, as I discovered it to myself and my colleagues, was probably the most extensive mission since the Spaniards first sailed up the River of Silver. It set their pencils scrawling; it amazed me and terrified Pat.

"Aren't you going to do too much?" she whispered.

"You'll never get to all those places."

"Hush—the wish is father to the whatever it is," I counselled.

At last flash-lights flashed, cameras clicked, and but for one young man, whose experience had been earned in the U.S.A., we were alone. We liked this young man. We drank whisky with him. He was, curse him, a first-rate newspaper man. He wanted a story, the German armament scare was all over

* A good wine of Mendoza.

the headlines in Europe. He had an idea I knew about it. As a matter of fact I knew a great deal about it.

The last author this young man had interviewed had not developed into good, printable "copy." The paper had wanted the author's views on B.A., but all they had got was a question:

"Tell me," the distinguished author had asked, "what does one do if the urge to relieve oneself occurs in, say, the Avenida de Mayo? Does one run at full speed over the mile or so to Retiro Station in the Plaza Britannica? Or what?"

It was a difficult question. There is only one public lavatory (or maybe two) in the whole vast city of Buenos Aires. People, I understand, gallop into the first open door, and some of them have developed an unerring instinct that leads them, almost without pause, to the right place. Imagine, however, an individual in whom this instinct is ill developed, quickening his pace, faster, faster, through the long corridors of a great office building, his agonized glance trying to pierce the frosted glass of the doors—all alike. . . .

It was three in the morning when we went to bed.

"You know," I said, "it's a bit of a devil to have to come all this way to be important."

"And tiring too. Good night."

II. THE GAME OPENS OUT

I awoke early. Pat was sleeping like a log. I wondered whether she cared very much what happened next. I read the papers, and was thoughtful. I knew that everything depended on my interview with Don Alberto, and on the kind of man he proved to be. If he proved to be pompous I knew I was lost: I cannot deal with pomposity; it makes me laugh.

I felt calm and collected that morning. It was clear I had risked a great deal on this one chance—and if it failed I should be hard put to it.

I forbore to wake Pat. She might sleep until the future had

become a little more decided. I went first to the shipping office—the money would give me a less hollow feeling when I saw Don Alberto. But there was no credit for me.

“Doubtless,” said a casual young man in the office, “It will arrive with our next instructions from London.”

“Doubtless,” I agreed.

I went to the office of Don Alberto and handed in my introduction. Cataratas del Iguazu seemed a deuce of a long way off now; farther than they had seemed in London. And Paraguay. . . .

Don Alberto was all that I had not dared to hope. He must be unique. His huge success had failed to stifle his sense of humour. He appeared to have few illusions about the gaining of his wealth, though he was clearly a thought stage or two ahead of the next man. He was not the man to discourse pompously to his employees as to his own hard work in the past and his own brilliant qualities. He was not the man to ask for “references.” He had contrived to become enormously rich and remain a human being.

I should have liked him had he been as broke as I was myself. I met his faintly smiling eyes and knew that it would be unnecessary to say anything. It was terrific luck—a chance in a million.

He was a man of medium height; quietly dressed; quiet voiced. His face gave an impression of roundness and youth. He looked forty, but was probably ten years older. I don't know. He was as much an Englishman as he was a South American. Probably he had the knack of being at home in any country.

There were two or three men with him as he came quietly into the room into which I had been shown, but nevertheless I felt that we were alone. I have scarcely any recollection of what we said during that first short interview. I know that Don Alberto remarked that he had seen the morning papers, and I looked straight at him and smiled. He knew, quite obviously.

I began to suggest—formally—that I should show him my credentials, but he dismissed the suggestion before I had uttered it completely.

"Everything will be done for you," he said quietly, with a faint hint of amusement. "I'll see you again."

Pat was still asleep when I got back, but after I had ordered coffee and rolls to be brought up I told her that life had been progressing terrifically for some hours.

"Alberto is a big man," I said; "Not one of those footling millionaires so swollen they can't see themselves."

"Thank God!" said Pat. "... And the money?"

"No money—yet."

That was the only fly in the ointment. We could not move a yard without money. I gathered we might leave for Paraguay whenever we liked, and the sooner the better. Every day was eating into that small credit. A week would almost ruin it, and we should be broke in Paraguay. That might be better than to be broke in Buenos Aires.

The Skipper arrived for lunch, and was more anxious than we were, but I had a feeling things were going right. Immediately after lunch a message came from Don Alberto with an invitation to the Yacht Squadron for cocktails, and dinner afterwards aboard his yacht.

Within five minutes a young man from *La Nacion* appeared and requested the honour of showing us the city on behalf of his newspaper, followed by an inspection of the offices and dinner.

We offered the young man coffee and a liqueur. Dinner we regretted was impossible. For the rest, we would be delighted.

We included the Skipper in the tour of inspection, but he wore a vaguely puzzled expression and I knew that was partly because he knew I had only a few cents in my pocket and he was trying to work out what would happen to us. All this was confirming in him his resolve to stick to the sea and keep clear of "interiors." He liked to know what was going to happen next.

Buenos Aires had grown. The young newspaper man spread his hands in wide proud gestures. "The rebuilding we have done is colossal—magnificent. We have rebuilt whole sections of the city so that it shall conform. We have straightened streets——"

And two or three skyscrapers had sprung up. Great white blocks diminishing slowly to slender oblongs; the striped orange and blue awnings of their myriad windows like eyelids.

"Treinte dos pisos." Thirty-two floors. A beautiful building!

It was an impressive building; the second thing we had seen as our ship had steamed along the channel to Darsena Norte; the first thing, of course, that anyone sees is the white wall with *ANGLO* printed in huge letters. After that these skyscrapers materialize out of the distance.

Our car swooped along the wide streets, the Avenida de Mayo, Pueyrredon, Santa Fé with its small exclusive shops, and down past the distinguished expensiveness of the Alvear Palace Hotel. This great wide highway to Palermo is the Park Lane of Buenos Aires, flanked by magnificent town mansions with austere wrought-iron gates and palm-shaded gardens.

And so to Palermo, as perfectly kept as it is possible to keep lawns and flower gardens and drives.

The Skipper seemed to have lost some of his worry in the enjoyment of this "interior." There are hundreds of skippers and seamen who have never gone a yard further than their offices and Fanny's Bar in thirty years of trading to the River Plate. And they are the same all over the world. Sailors never travel.*

On the way back we dismissed the taxi in Pueyrredon and resorted to the Subterraneo. We three Englishmen threw out our chests and cleared our throats, prepared to give this

* Our skipper was of the younger school. Given the old days when a skipper might have been part owner of a tramp, he might have been a rival to Captain Harry Sharpness Spink of "Double" Gloucester.

little underground a benevolent pat on the head. But it was good—what there was of it. Not a sign of an official—everything automatic. And I thought Pat was going to be homesick at the sound of the familiar harsh screech of the train in the tunnels.

We leapt out after three stations, and entered a different Subterraneo—an English company this time. It made the same noise.

“Whenever you pine for home and we’re in B.A. you’d better take a ride on this,” I said to Pat.

“About all we can afford,” she answered.

Our young newspaper man had contrived to bring us to the surface again within a few yards of his office.

The Skipper left us. He had to be back aboard. He cleared his throat, whispered good luck in my ear, and pressed an envelope into my hand—“to open later.” I had noticed him performing vague secret evolutions in the taxi and struggling with a pencil.

That newspaper office was the most remarkable place I saw in Buenos Aires. Even Lord Beaverbrook’s black glass tower of Babel took a back seat. I must admit I clung to the *Daily Express* in my mind for a minute or two, but it was no good. We were in a palace. The gothic gorgeousness of the outside was no outer husk. We were in a monastery; an abbey; a feudal castle. We tiptoed along silent cloisters; here and there we glimpsed sights more accustomed—typists in phalanxes, hard at work. We imagined the “director” (we say editor) sitting in a kind of cocoon of pure gold at the heart of this thing, probably having his great domed forehead sprayed like Mr. H. G. Wells’ Grand Lunar.

Our guide turned at last for my opinion, hopefully.

“This,” I said inadequately, “is the most magnificent newspaper office I have ever seen or dreamed of. In London I can show you great buildings of æsthetic design; luxurious hotels; abbeys; perfect parks and gardens . . . but——”

It no longer seemed strange to me that *La Prensa* and *La*

Nacion were two of the finest newspapers in the world. It would have seemed strange if they had not been.

We found that nearly all the young men on these papers, including our guide, were "doctors"—of what I do not know, but it was exceedingly right.

Only the town mansions of the owners of these newspapers can eclipse their offices, and Pat and I discovered a new ambition simultaneously: we must become newspaper proprietors in Buenos Aires.

We drank cocktails swiftly in the Boston Bar thanking our newspaper friend. The evening was upon us, and with it realization of penury. I paid for the drinks and had ten cents. An hour ahead lay Alberto and the Yacht Squadron.

"Pat, old lady," I said, as we pushed our way down Florida towards our hotel. "I believe you're going to have to walk down to the docks in evening dress." But she didn't. That dear old Skipper—you've guessed, of course. . . . "I can't see you go without any money. . . ." We were a further fifty dollars in debt.

III. ARGENTINE NIGHT

When I opened the envelope in the privacy of our room fifty dollars appeared a reasonably substantial sum of money. Later that night it seemed that the best thing to do was to give it to a waiter and hope he would accept it. I didn't do that. Other world as the next week proved to be, I managed to keep a vague memory of the real world somewhere in my consciousness and guard my fifty dollars against my return.

The Argentine Yacht Club is a fine white spiral-shaped building with its dining-room windows making a glittering curve around its broad base. It stands on a mole jutting out into the harbour, and we had had plenty of time to ruminate on its possible magnificence as the tugs had manœuvred our ship to its berth.

Don Alberto greeted us charmingly. Within a few minutes

Pat was wearing a yachting cap and looked rather saucy. She had on an evening gown in two shades of blue and Don Alberto's yachting cap gave her what the Skipper would have called a "look." We drank a concoction somewhat "Pim-mish," known as an *Americano*. It was easy to drink. Several of the people seemed as perfect in English as in their native tongues. We were at home.

While ten or a dozen guests gathered we absorbed three or four of these most excellent *Americanos*. Don Alberto was with all of us at once. He had a small way of laughing that I liked. You couldn't exactly hear it.

Presently we were all tucked into two speed-boats, the ladies muffled to their ears in fur rugs, and we zoomed over to the yacht, across half a mile of still water that held the lights of Buenos Aires. Sailors at the gangway helped us aboard. A beautiful girl who might have stepped right off Fifth Avenue—for she had that terrific finish that is peculiar to some American women—welcomed us in the intriguing nasal tones of her country and led us into the smoking-room where we were plied again with rich grown *Americanos* in small barrel tumblers.

"I've been teaching Toni English while waiting for you folks," the girl told us in her rich accents, and it seemed to me that Toni's white-gloved hand trembled as he proffered me an *Americano* on a salver, and his long face grew possibly longer.

But it was soon clear that all Toni had learned was the sound of his own name in American, and "*Americanos*." If you said: "Toni! *Americano*!" in perfect English, it worked.

Carol was a fine teacher. Later she taught Toni that cigarette meant cigarette, but since *cigarro* is cigar in Spanish and cigarette is *cigarillo* perhaps that was not so very difficult. When Toni came to know that Chesterfield meant cigarette it was perhaps the greatest linguistic achievement for him and Carol.

Pat could speak twenty words of Spanish to Carol's one but she had not the same confidence. Carol saw her through.

"Don't you worry, honey, about not knowing Spanish. They pick up English right off."

So we were a happy party.

There are few things more boring than an account of a delightful dinner that you have not eaten yourself. Details of the dinner we had that evening would bore you dreadfully. We did not really begin to know each other until we had stowed it away with its accompanying Pol Roger, and kümmel was settling it all in place.

I extracted Pat from a learned conversation on the subject of cattle with a man who was afterwards to become our very good friend. Since the time that Rosas was a boy his family had reared vast herds of cattle on the southern plains of Buenos Aires Province, bordering on the Pampas. His Durham cattle were the finest quality beef that one might find in the world, and Don Pablo, their owner, was certainly the finest quality man; the true type of Spanish caballero. He was tall and well built, with a quiet voice and that unobtrusive perfection of bearing that no one succeeds in cultivating. One must be born that way. He spoke moderate English; he seldom came to B.A.—where he owned one of those wrought-iron-portalld mansions—but preferred to spend his days on his estancia amongst his cattle and his cattle men.

"I have been pleading with your señora," he said. "Before you leave South America you must be my guests at Los Angeles—my estancia in the south."

Los Angeles is one of the show places of the Argentine.

But there was no immediate chance of developing this theme. Small personal conversations were not to be. There was a banker, a small wizened little man with a crinkly bald head, but with a terrific spark of life in him. He was irascible as the devil and had a tremendous vehemence about everything. And there was a very large round man with a great round face that would have looked just right on top of a monk's robe with a cowl draped around it. His brown eyes

were like velvet, and he knew just how to produce the maximum of vehemence, in anger or laughter, out of this little old banker.

The large round man was a born comedian. He spoke Spanish at a great rate, and it was funny even when one could not understand a word. His own laughter followed his sentences in short gusts that gave the impression of being curbed forcibly, as though a shutter clanged shut over his throat after each gust.

The ladies were elegant. And they were beautiful. They were quiet, too, but for Carol and one who was the most exquisite creature I ever hope to see. Carol was giving one of her efficient English courses to this child—she appeared to be about seventeen. Her hair was the sort of corn colour magazine story writers try to give their heroines but you don't believe it, her complexion was the most delicate pink and white. Her mouth made me think of peaches that can be warm and cool at the same time and have a tawinness near the stone that is somehow just the right colour.

It's no use trying to describe her because she was very nearly impossible. Carol sort of goggled at her and said:

" Say ! "

Pat said: " Can she be true ? "

I said: " I should think she'd have her work cut out with the competition. "

But that was wrong. She was too beautiful to touch. She had wide eyes the colour of fresh corn-flowers that looked straight at you; and then she would laugh. It was worth hearing.

It would have been grossly unfair and sinful if she had had brains too—perhaps she had. I don't know. Most men looking at that astonishing girl would forget about brains.

" Well, say ! " exclaimed Carol. " She sings English, but she can't understand a word. Can you beat it ! "

Presently she sang in English. An orchestra from one of the Buenos Aires cabarets had arrived aboard during dinner

and was making music on the after deck. Deep seats thick with cushions half circled the crescent of floor on which we danced. But first, to the accompaniment of a mandolin in the hands of an artist, Juanita—but that is not her name—sang. She sang the songs the crooners croon, but she did not croon. Her voice was low and soft, yet full as a bell, though at times she did a husky bit and closed her lips in a kind of hum that nearly made the old banker weep on my shoulder.

. . . Smoke gets in your eyes . . .

Carol danced as effectively as Juanita sang. The rumba almost meant something when she did it. She spread excitement.

La Cucaracha *aa aa aa aa* simply held a great rumble of mad rhythm, and a man whom I believed to be a judge danced out onto the floor with the lightness of a cat in spite of his seventeen stone. Together they danced superbly.

The music worked up. Juanita was "looking for an angel, but angels were so few. . . ." I found it difficult to believe she didn't know what the words meant. She danced almost as well as Pat. The music worked up. Laughter grew in us, and the sound of it went sailing out over the light-dappled waters to the silent hulls of huge ships in their berths half a mile away.

I had never experienced a party that was so naturally gay. Americanos and Pol Roger were there in any quantity, but they were not essentials. No one drank very much. No fillip was needed. Carol noticed this too, for she said: "Say! These people laugh all the time—because they like it——"

A girl in a sheathlike dress of black lace and a mantilla of the same stuff danced the very antithesis of Carol's rumba. She had the spirit of Spain; a great comb in her jet black hair; the jewelled high heels of her shoes tap-tapping as her body swayed to the music of the south.

"Toni! Americanos!"

"Si, señorita——"

"You're a fast learner, Toni."

The young, but huge, man I took to be a judge unleashed his voice. It was a grand voice—perhaps he was an opera star and not a judge. He was the right size, anyway.

"There's our ship over there," I said to Pat; and we thought of the Skipper and the old Chief perhaps looking over the water towards us.

The orchestra was playing with the devil's own rhythm. It was not good to think; only to dance.

La cucaracha—la cucaracha *aa aa aaa a*

Ya no puede caminar. . . .

And Don Alberto, smiling faintly, was the core of it all.

It must have been soon after midnight when the square tall figure of the German captain (he had navigated the yacht from Hamburg—no mean task) threaded a way gingerly across the after-deck bringing the news that a 20,000-ton liner was out in the roads and would be docking within the next few hours.

"Vamos!" invited Don Alberto, and half a dozen of us deserted the merrymaking to go out and greet the liner.

One of the speed-boats was already in the water alongside as we reached the gangway. There was a tang in the air out in the roads, and Carol, Juanita and Pat tucked themselves well down muffled to the ears in furs. It was a much larger speed-boat than either of those first used, and there was room to stand and up walk about as we cut through the water, sending two great scarves of spray from our bows.

It was good to be alive that night, and I remember Don Alberto saying quietly in my ear: "Not bored are you, Don Reginaldo?"

I know I thought, "Oh, shut up!" but I don't expect I said it. Far away across the river that was now clouting us under the bows with tiny wavelets, the huge bulk of the liner was like a palace of a million lights. Right from her water-line even lines of yellow lights traced her length, and were

crowned with a brilliant blaze at her decks and over the high mass of her superstructure.

"Give them a whistle," said Don Alberto, and our siren shrieked out, to be answered almost at once by a deep bay that seemed to ricochet endlessly, booming over the whole width of the Rio de la Plata and rolling back from the city on its banks.

A dozen tugs with tall thin yellow funnels were nosing around her like a litter of pigs at their mother—it was exactly like that as the small tugs bunted her angrily, head on—and we roared under her stern, leaving a deep wake of foam that had scarcely subsided by the time we made the circuit. Passengers were crowding her decks, and at one stage we stopped while Don Alberto carried on a megaphone conversation.

Within an hour we were back on the yacht and ready to make a move. The banker and Don Pablo had already left, and we followed them almost at once in the two smaller speed-boats.

"Tired, old girl?" I whispered, to Pat as we just showed our noses above the rugs. "Not very," she said.

It was just as well. We were not on our way home. Four sleek cars were at the landing-stage. We sped through the silent streets. Ten minutes later we were dancing to the melancholy rhythm of a Cossack orchestra.

There was no tiredness in us. It was years since we had had a real party, and this one could just go on going on as far as we were concerned.

It was a strange night club; a long room with tables surrounding an oblong floor of some kind of green linoleum that appeared to be sprung. It was good to dance on. On a dais sat a band of ten exceedingly miserable human beings, most of whom were squeezing music out of accordions. They were all dressed in smocks and Cossack dress, and the lights were green so that everyone looked horribly haggard, and all faces seemed long.

But we were not troubling about that. We felt well. The man I took to be a judge was persuading Don Alberto that we should all go to his house for a change. Presently we went. He could not have been either a judge or an opera star with such a house. Beautifully wrought iron gates broke a high white wall. Don Antonio—I have tired of calling him judge and opera star now that I am sure he was not either—opened them.

We passed to a spacious courtyard with statuary that showed dim and mysterious in the colourless light of the first hours of morning. Don Antonio clapped his hands softly; two servants appeared on the marble steps of the portico. They were noiseless.

We entered a hall dimly lit, the roof lost in shadows, the floor exquisite mosaic. There were stained-glass windows, and curved arches that led through to open patios. There was no clue to the size of this mansion; a succession of halls like the one we were in would not have been a surprise. A light flicked on, illuminating a small antechamber. It was the bar. Perfectly fitted. We were all disinclined to drink, but we admired the completeness of the drinking arrangements, and realized that there was no taste too bizarre to be catered for immediately. We also admired the very rude and brilliant caricatures adorning the walls: again I thought he might have been a judge.

We talked. Time passed easily. Don Antonio could say—"I spik Englis" and there his English began and ended. This went on for some time until someone discovered a hunger—for food.

"Let's go to the Fogorn," said Don Alberto.

We went to the Fogorn. It is a small restaurant of the kind that all Argentines patronize in Buenos Aires. A long room—no sawdust on the floor, but you wouldn't have been surprised if there had been—barely furnished with cheap tables and chairs in unimaginative rows. The tablecloths are clean. These restaurants have no pretensions; but you

should eat at them, always, if you have a chance. The food is perfect. Lo Prete is a good one, and there is another in Suipacha. They are all over the place; unobtrusive; the sort of places no traveller would enter unless he knew about them.

Don Pablo was already installed, eating very slowly, silently, and with obvious relish. The banker, he said, had grown bad tempered and had gone home. "Thees beef," he said, "Eet ees wu-underfol?" His voice went like that when he was very pleased and sure.

We ate steak, done to a turn and so tender our knives balanced on the rich brown surface and fell like guillotines to our plates two inches beneath. With it we had sweet corn on the cob, and drank chianti.

As we drank coffee a small urchin with a sheaf of papers under his arm bawled nasally—"La Prensa—La Nacion," and we read that we were the guests of Don Alberto aboard his yacht. There was a column on the subject that was quite interesting.

IV. URUGUAYAN NIGHT

At half past nine my little battalion of newspaper reporters arrived, but I did not discover that until half-past eleven. Victor was my friend. But at half-past eleven he could not leave us sleeping longer. There was a message from Don Alberto: "Would we join the yacht at noon?"

We would.

The party had suffered certain changes. Carol was bright but sleepy-eyed. Don Antonio was silent, for him. Don Alberto remained his impeccable self. The Monk—you remember the round man with velvet brown eyes?—still exuded laughter, but in a gentle kind of way. And that was all that remained of the night before. There were replacements in the shape of two young men and a most fascinating woman who was only in her early thirties, but who, neverthe-

less, was equally at home in London, Paris, New York, Berlin, Vienna, Rio or Buenos Aires. In fact, she belonged naturally to the Don Antonio set.

At one o'clock we sailed. We lunched. Don Antonio vanished. The waters of the River Plate when a strong wind blows from the south-east and piles them up over Martin Garcia bar, give a fair imitation of the sea, and Antonio, singer that he was, judge that he might be, was surely no sailor.

The lunch was exquisite; conversation restrained but promising. George, one of the younger men, spoke excellent English; the flowers for the ladies (which, like the table linen provided a different colour scheme at each meal) were perfect.

Within half an hour of lunch the decks were deserted. We retired to our staterooms to take some more sleep. There were two suites, beautifully furnished, that would have seemed spacious in a modern flat. There were also numerous excellent two-berth cabins and enough bathrooms to satisfy even an American—Carol, for example.

It was, as you must have gathered, a good-sized craft to have come across from Hamburg under its own power (but without its superstructure), and it was extraordinary how much space there was in relation to its appearance. The kitchens were spacious, and they needed to be to produce the works of art in which the German chef took great pride. And there must have been good quarters for the crew—though where they were I do not know.

We slept until late afternoon and made our way to the after deck to find Don Alberto alone and tea ready on a side table. We had crossed the Parana-Rosario and the Parana-Iguazu and were threading our way along a narrow canal towards the Uruguay river. Slim *aromo* trees stood up straight out of the swampy ground in solid phalanxes for miles on either side of us; the sun reddened the waters; and here and there on the banks rough shanties stood high on rickety wooden poles like

the skinny legs of aged men. Mainly these slim-treed woods were silent, but occasionally there would be the high shrill chatter of dark-skinned urchins, and the warning or threatening bleat of a ponderous mother. Sometimes we saw these mothers, sitting like great hens with their broods around them, and they would croak throaty greetings to which we always replied.

The whole of the mouth of this great river system is mazed with these straight canals bordered always with *aromo* trees. For hundreds of miles the canals network the country, and all dwellings are necessarily on stilts. Years before old Mac* and I had rowed a double sculler from Campana along dozens of these water avenues, losing ourselves frequently, and watching our revolver bullets ricochet spurting trails, never hitting the water fowl at which they were aimed.

It is a strange piece of country, devoted almost entirely to the cultivation of the swift-growing timber that in five years grows to a height of thirty feet and provides the best wood for packing cases. It is a safe industry, but there are others more interesting. The Monk and Don Antonio, who had reappeared, told us of one of these jobs. First they explained that it was not the choppy water of the River Plate that had caused their retirement. While we had slept these two large-bodied warehouses of drollery had returned to the saloon to gamble dismally and consume a bottle of cointreau and another of benedictine. This, they said, had made them sleepy.

They had our admiration. If any of the mosquitoes, now setting about their business with the purple, gold and scarlet of the going down of the sun, had tried their biting on either of these men they might have got more than they gave.

"I know a young man, an Englishman," said the Monk, and rumbled with laughter, "who has a chicken farm hereabouts. It is a sight. His wooden house stands on its poles amidst a thicket of miniature houses balanced on single poles. He has

* In *Argentine Interlude*.

about one hundred chickens, each one in its own house, and twice a day he rows round his farm in a small boat calling at all the houses for eggs. There is a terrific clucking from this colony in the early morning."

It seemed to us a strange place to choose for a chicken farm. It is the only chicken farm on stilts I have ever heard of.

"He makes a living," said the Monk, surprisedly. "But if you are his guest you must remember not to go for a walk in the garden."

The sun had gone down, and the moon had not yet risen to guide us. It was as black as the pit in the narrow lane of water with its tall hedges of trees. We came down to half speed, and occasionally heard the lap lap of water that told of a small launch gliding past us. Presently our powerful headlight illumined the road for us and it was as if we slid down an enormous tunnel with a floor of black glass.

Americanos arrived; bridge tables were out in the smoke room. I declined, with firmness, to play. For the first time in some hours I was reminded of my fifty dollars. They probably played dollar points—fifty-dollar points—it would be all the same to them. I daren't risk it.

Pat and I wandered to the bows, and the moon came up so that far ahead we saw a great sheet of water as though through a telescope. Within ten minutes we had emerged from the closed-in blackness of the canal into the wide moon-silvered breadth of the Uruguay river that meanders northward for a thousand miles, making the eastern boundary of Argentine with Uruguay and Brazil, and finally joins the Iguazu to enclose the whole of Entre Rios, Corrientes, and Misiones in one great island with the Parana on the west.

But the Uruguay is not navigable for any but small shallow draft vessels much above Salto and Concordia, a bare three hundred miles from the sea. In a continent that has the Orinoco, the Amazon and the Parana, the Uruguay scarcely amounts to a river at all.

By dinner-time we were tied up at Carmelo, the third port of

Uruguay, a quiet, sleepy village with two or three barges against its wharf, and, beyond a cobbled strip of road, a low line of buildings showed their peeling pink plaster under the moon and seemed to be deserted. But behind this bare prospect a puff of light in the sky, and the dim music of a band, promised a Plaza. There is no town or village in South America that has not its wide plaza where the people gather in the warm evenings to drink, to laugh, to fight, to ogle, and to parade.

A young Englishman and his wife came aboard. He was one of Don Alberto's managers, and in the daylight we should see the ship repairing yard that he managed. This young Englishman and his wife were perfectly at home on the yacht and were easy mannered with Don Alberto. I had the impression that the smallest of his employees would be known to him, and that they would all display this ease of manner with him. I ceased to worry about my fifty dollars.

The young man told me during dinner that he had come out on a cargo boat for a round voyage holiday when he was twenty-one. His ship was staying for two weeks. That was eleven years ago. He had met Don Alberto.

I had a fleeting thought that perhaps I would not mind something like that happening to me. We danced. It was a very quiet and happy evening; the Monk and Don Antonio were tremendous, and presently a small wizened little man, who was the chef, and who had produced raviolis for dinner that had melted on the tongue, shuffled up from his kitchens to the after deck and began to sing grand opera in a small cracked voice. We would have forgiven him anything after those raviolis.

Don Antonio sang a duet with him. It was huge. Tears ran down Don Alberto's cheeks. The little cook was a German. It was a shame about his funny little wheeze of a voice. There was music inside him, and it could not get out. But Don Antonio's full-bodied tenor made up for that, and later on we heard it resounding in the wide Plaza where he and

the Monk walked arm in arm with Carol and the cosmopolitan lady.

We stayed aboard with the two younger men while Don Alberto talked with his manager.

My afternoon siesta had ruined sleep for me that night, and it must have been about two in the morning when I gave up trying and wandered up on deck in my dressing-gown. The sky was lowering with heavy banks of cloud, and there was a great hush in the air, and a stillness. I sat with my legs dangling over the side and just let my mind drift lazily. Presently a slight figure in a dressing-gown came and sat beside me and offered a cigarette, and we were silent for some time, smoking. The river was like a black pearl, cloudy, distorting the reflections of our feet.

We drifted into talking; of England, of Argentine and of the Chaco war, but mostly of England. We talked of our businesses, our troubles, our hopes, the struggles we had had. It did not seem in the least queer that this prince of industry and I should be talking like that. I said: "I have come out here to try and repair my fortunes. I had to take a chance. I couldn't just sit down and write—on nothing—paying off."

Don Alberto knew by then just what my fortunes were. It had worried me that perhaps he had thought I was well off, that I was his guest under false pretences. But I need not have worried.

"You'll have everything you want," he said. "You couldn't have it now unless you had inherited it, or had extraordinary luck."

We smoked innumerable cigarettes and at last went to our beds. I felt better altogether. At five o'clock there was a storm that sounded as if God's house had fallen down. We were in the vortex of a cannonade of heaven's heavy artillery and fireworks such as are only staged in tropical countries, and the rain came down and joined with the river beneath with such force that it seemed there was nothing else but water.

In my childhood I had slept through eight air raids, some

within a few hundred yards, but I could not sleep through that storm at Carmelo, tired as I was.

It was past eleven before anyone appeared for breakfast.

All through that day we meandered slowly over the river, cutting through endless canals that made navigation no mean task. The charts were worse than jigsaw puzzles.

It was Sunday. We had to go at half speed for fear of submerging the ancient launches that chugged along piled high with cargoes of beer, fruit, or bundles of aromo logs. There was not an inch to spare above the water-lines, and another bottle, orange or stick must have sunk any of them. Occasionally we passed pleasure launches crammed with humanity to the same point of sinking. There was a great stiffness about these people, and perhaps it was fear of capsizing that made them sit so erect and still. There were mountainous women encased in sombre black; luminous-eyed girls in dark dresses sitting, hands in laps, demure; young men straw hatted and buttoned tight into black suits.

They made a strange contrast with our party. Our girls in bathing suits; our men, but for Don Antonio and the Monk who wore flannels and open shirts, in swimming shorts. It must be extremely uncomfortable to be poor and to feel bound to wear all those clothes in that climate.

But here and there a younger party passed us—or perhaps only another strata of society, higher or lower, I do not know—less straitlaced, and with smiling faces; and with all of them, the beer man and his launch, and the timber man with his well-judged burden, and the sober parties and the less sober parties, we exchanged greetings and polite inquiries.

There came a time when I could not avoid playing bridge. I was in a sweat of fear. At the end of the rubber there was 800 in it. I composed my face: "That's eighty cents you owe me," said Carol. It was a great strain on my face.

While the sun was still strong in the sky we arrived in the Tigre, the Thames of the south. It was like home to us. But even here the girls were restrained in their clothing. It

was a sin to see so much sombre black in a setting that was made for colour. Green lawns, gay with tables and brilliant sun canopies, ran down to the river banks from palatial clubs and mansions all gleaming white, with flags flying from their turrets and towers. Cabin cruisers and launches with shining brass work made their stately ways through a huddle of small craft, and most of them waved to us. George, the young Argentine, appeared to know everyone.

We anchored and dived into the swift-running stream, but there was too much current for real enjoyment and Pat couldn't fight against it. The two young Argentines and I had to form a human chain from the lowered companion ladder and drag her in.

But there was no real danger. The sails of a hundred yachts billowed in the breeze; canoes, dinghies, and small craft of all shapes and sizes drifted idly, and there would have been no lack of helping hands and oars.

A fair-sized town has grown on the banks of Tigre, and it seems that the whole of Buenos Aires escapes to this pleasant arm of the Parana-Rosario on the hot airless days. A few years ago the Argentines could not swim; now they are learning fast and will soon be sending their champions about the world.

We up anchored as the sun set and the rippling water was quartered gold, green, purple and blue, and sky and river became a miracle of colour, crimson and amber behind the stately white buildings. Ahead of us, where the stream broadened to the parent river, the glimmer and curve of countless sails were like white birds skimming the water.

But Tigre is not old Thames; not so gay; not so tranquil; not so beautiful. Old Thames does not need to borrow from the sky.

V. GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT

We found the Skipper just recovering from a bad bout of gastric trouble and as gloomy as only a healthy man knows

how to be when these things mysteriously happen. Also, the races had not come off that week-end at Palermo, and many skippers consider the races are part of a River Plate contract. On top of that, there were no loading instructions and he still did not know where he was going.

For him in his gloom we were not ideal companions. The fifty dollars was still more or less intact, but the suave clerk at the shipping office informed us that there was no news of money. This was disturbing and affairs wanted thinking about seriously. The next day we had to sail for Paraguay. It was all arranged. I could have put off sailing until the next steamer but Buenos Aires simply ate money, and once on the river we should be fairly safe.

"Money or no money," I said, "we sail to-morrow."

"Well, don't let my little bit worry you," said the Skipper. "I'm going to bed. I'll be along to-morrow to see you off."

We said good-bye. Victor hovered around. He hoped that we had enjoyed ourselves. We hoped that he wouldn't mind not being paid—but we didn't say so.

"We'll pack a trunk and a suitcase and leave the rest behind. To-morrow we sail. That's definite. Victor won't mind. We've got to come back, and he'll have most of our luggage."

"But in Paraguay?" Pat hazarded.

"Wait till we get there," I said. "We'll have just about enough money to get aboard and tip the stewards—and the money must arrive soon."

We went to bed early, and somewhat gloomily. I advised Victor that we should be leaving and that we should want him to store most of our stuff. I said nothing about money.

In the morning I hesitated outside the shipping office. The clerk and I were beginning to get on each other's nerves. I wandered in: "Good morning. My mail?" I began.

"Ah, we have a credit for you," said the young man. He produced a wad of notes and counted them out. We shook hands politely.

I went into the Mihanovich office and collected our passes, and dived into Lloyd's bar on the corner of Sarmiento and Reconquista in the hope of finding the Skipper and his morning coffee.

"Skipper—we've got our money—everything's jake!"

His face lighted up. "I'm glad," he said. "I've been worried."

His gastritis was better, and I dragged him back to the hotel. We would have a farewell lunch. Pat's anxiety fled the moment she saw us. "You've got the money!"

Anybody would have thought it was a fortune, but I knew quite well that it would just about get us as far as a new trouble. We were going to have a nasty gap of about ten days without a cent, and I must work things so that that would happen in the right place.

We dashed joyfully into Harrods and lunched well. The last traces of the Skipper's pains vanished with the langostinos. We paid our debts. We paid Victor. With 230 dollars we piled into a taxi and down to the "General Alvear" to sail at four in the afternoon for Asuncion.

The Skipper had had to go down to his ship, and we were afraid he might not turn up to see us off. The "General Alvear" seemed to be crowded with babbling mothers, and children who seemed more like small-sized grown ups. And everyone wore black. My grey flannels and tweed coat were like a brand.

People stared; not slyly; but directly and openly, following us slowly round much in the way that owls do in the bush. We tried to find a piece of rail on the top deck from which we might look for the Skipper. A little boy next me, his hair perfectly brushed and oiled, his suit cut on mannish lines, examined me closely and brought his mother along to do the same.

I did not know then that these were just ordinary provincials or middle-class Argentines behaving normally. I thought there was something wrong with them.

The arrival of the Skipper released us from this barrage of eyes. We went to the bar and had a drink.

"Well; cheers, Skipper. I don't know what we should have done without you."

"It seems ages since we left Liverpool," said Pat.

"I liked having you aboard—we all liked it," said the Skipper shyly. "Good luck."

It was clear that he had his doubts about us going off deep into the "interior" with about £10 in real money, and no more for a month.

We felt we were saying good-bye to the last little bit of England; the real journey just beginning.

The "General Alvear" blared her siren and moved slowly from the wharf.

The Skipper cupped his hands: "Look after yourselves!"

"I'll drop you a line," I shouted.

Presently we turned from the rail and linked arms, with just the suspicion of a sigh.

"Well, we're really on our way—with this strange kettle of fish" (the eyes were still upon us). "Good-bye to all that."

CHAPTER V

ONE THOUSAND MILES UP THE PARANA

I. ARGENTINE

THE "General Alvear" was full, but the chief steward managed to let us have a table to ourselves at the forward end of the saloon. We were glad of that, for we had not grown accustomed to the precocity of the children. It would not have surprised us if the little dark-skinned fellow in long pants at the table next ours had wandered over and helped himself to a rather promising drumstick of chicken on my plate. Had we been sitting at the same table he might have done so.

Dinner was a sober affair. There was an incredible mass of food to eat; a succession of courses, each one sufficient for a normal appetite. We imagined each course—with the possible exception of the fish which seemed to be made of large spiky bones with small spines of flesh here and there—to be the one and only. There were large juicy steaks; mutton chops replaced them; chickens—and so on, and still they came.

The small boys and girls goggled at us as we declined most of this food, but their goggling did not prevent them from doing full justice to all set before them. Occasionally the large dark eyes of huge mothers followed the gaze of their offspring and lay on us without apparent reaction of any kind. But for the succulent champing of jaws the saloon was soundless.

I said to Pat: "A kind of excursion that's got mixed up with a funeral."

"They can't be going all the way——" She speculated hopefully.

"Of course not," I said with conviction. "They'll leave

at Rosario to-morrow. It's cheaper than the train journey, and food and lodging thrown in."

A small boy came over to us and stood with his hands on the edge of our table while his head turned slowly from side to side. Apparently he was hoping that we should speak again. His mother's head came round slowly towards him, and turned slowly back.

I said in English: "And what can we do for you, little man?"

"I know darn well what I could do!" said Pat.

This appeared to abash him, and he backed away cautiously. We had not learned at that time that the whole of the Argentine, or at least the civilized part of it, is a kind of Bertrand Russell school. A harsh word is never spoken to a child; schoolmasters and others do not whack; the ego, as it were, has full scope; animals are cut about and ill treated; butterflies, flies and all kinds of insects are joyously dismembered. I suppose there is not a damaged ego or an inhibition in the whole country. The sight of a small boy with unbrushed hair, dirty knees, and odd pieces of string hanging from his pockets, would have cheered us greatly. But there is no such animal; only these perfect little gentlemen—and ladies.

It was after ten o'clock when we realized that bedtime would not bring relief from these modern children, and we went to bed ourselves. The speed of the ship had not been lessened, and I had expected we should anchor during the night. From Buenos Aires to Santa Fé the river is navigable for ocean-going vessels drawing up to twenty-three feet,* and there is a good deal of traffic.

I went forrard to have a look round, and it seemed to me that we were steaming on a winding course in pitch darkness.

* Practically speaking, 4,000 tons gross is the maximum size for a ship trading to Rosario or Santa Fé. An average of twenty ships a month take out 8,000 tons of grain each per month. But Martin Garcia bar calls the tune. Even at twenty-three feet steamers are held up for days waiting for a favourable wind to pile up the water, and I have crossed several times scraping the sand all the way. It is roughly four hours slow steaming over the bar, and at one time the channel was dredged to a depth of twenty-six feet. Buenos Aires was afraid of losing trade.

The Captain was leaning over the railed platform of his small semi-circular bridge.

"Do we always keep going all through the night?" I asked.

"Si, señor," he said. "Later I will show you. Except when the *niebla** is bad in the early morning we keep up a steady ten knots."

Somehow that gave me a clearer picture of the immensity of the river than the mere mention of one or two thousand miles. That these steamers plugged on day and night for as much as ten days right into the heart of this stupendous continent. That one could, in fact, in smaller boats, go on for weeks and months on these interminable waterways.

In our cabin, when we had turned out the light and were beginning to get the feel of the comfortable beds, we found there were worse pests than Argentine children. The mosquitos zoomed down at us with that maddening small screech that reaches its peak just at the ear-drum. We covered our heads with the sheets and left them to it. They were welcome to our blood if only they would cease their high-pitched screeching in our ears.

In the morning the steward brought a bottle of pure alcohol to ease the irritation of the red blotches the night's mosquito feast had raised all over Pat. She was reasonably good-tempered in spite of the fact that it was clear her blood was going to be regarded as something fresh and tasty by the teeming insect life that would presently discover her.

We bathed, somewhat to the consternation of the steward, an obliging cheerful soul who delighted in Pat's peculiar Spanish efforts. She had tried to make him understand "soap" through the bathroom door—there is never any soap. The bathrooms were first-rate but were mainly kept to be looked at. Surely we were not so dirty that we couldn't wait five days? We explained that it was just a habit we had got into, and since we were English and obviously mad we were excused.

* Mist.

The river had changed. On either bank low scrub and sparse brown grass reached away to the rims of the sky, scarcely broken by a tree. Occasionally there were crude wooden huts with a few trees, and rough cattle-yards at the water's edge. From one of these a hundred head of steers were being loaded into *chatas*;* peons with moustachios, greasy *bombachas*† buttoned at the ankles, and rope-soled slippers, whirled *lazos*‡ and *rebenques*, and screamed as they chivvied the flanks of the dubious animals. But the river banks were mostly a drab prospect.

Two or three times we passed British ships, their propellers beating slowly half out of the water as they steamed towards the grain ports of Rosario and Santa Fé.

The children, when they appeared on deck, viewed us with less concern. The lack of sustained interest their mentors must have regretted in them was a relief to us. The sun was climbing high and the heat was far greater than in an English summer, but the sombre black of the women remained. Pat's was the only white frock. Among the men mine was the only shirt with an open neck, mine the only body not covered by a coat. Decorum was terrific.

We longed for Rosario, and when it came it added to our passenger list. Three or four men departed; three or four families arrived. We were resigned.

"Anyway," I said, "They won't be going out of Argentine. We shall have the last day or so without being watched."

Already we were in a different world from Buenos Aires. The wharves of Argentine's "Manchester" or "Liverpool" crowded with a hurrying, shouting, scrambling mob of humanity. Bare-footed peons of tremendous fatness or thinness, but seldom of medium size, trotted up and down the wide gang-plank from the lower deck with heavy cases stooping their shoulders. A few girls of the ancient sisterhood watched

*Barges.

† A kind of "Turkish" trouser worn all over South America.

‡ Short riding whips, the handle about the same length as the flat strip of raw hide thong.

the decks and the wharf unhopefully, the white powder edged their dark skins giving them an unwashed look.

Further up river huge grain-elevators poured thousands of tons of maize and wheat into the open holds of ships, and out in the stream a score more waited their turns. Presently our old "Kayeson" would join them.

Beyond Rosario the river breaks at intervals into streams of equal size. At times the distant bank would be a vague blur in the white glare of the sun. Sometimes we would turn almost at right angles zigzagging from side to side as we followed the tortuous channels. It was a hungry-looking river, dangerous, forbidding. Not once did those waters seem inviting.

The whole surface was broken by swift currents and frequent whirlpools that would have endangered small craft. The water seemed in perpetual stress. Huge islands split the river, sometimes vast areas of land as big as English counties, so that we would forget that we were on only half a river until it suddenly joined up again.

But these river island territories are not safe for cultivation or cattle. They are apt to disappear completely, and others appear in their place. The Captain—when we had made friends—told us of a man who had tried to buy one of these islands but the government had been so slow negotiating the deal that the land had vanished before the treaty had been completed.

"That man would have owned a nice piece of river, about 20,000 hectares in a thin strip down the middle, if the government had hurried themselves," said the Captain gloomily.

And there are small floating islands called *camelotes* always sailing slowly down stream; the leaves of the pale mauve water-lilies serving them as sails in the light breeze. These *camelotes* are sometimes beautiful, and often have long-legged birds standing erect upon them, seeming surprised at their strange craft.

Each day it grew hotter. Each day we stopped at small

villages; the pink plaster peeling from the walls of the low buildings with their iron window grilles; the dust rising in slow clouds from the hoofs of a peon's pony. Clusters of dark-skinned urchins watched in silence or broke into sudden shrill chatter. Small groups of girls in bright printed cotton dresses, reds, greens and mauves, lined the wharves, but they too seemed content just to gaze at our three-decked steamer.

Soon the country grew wilder; tangled masses of vegetation with here and there a tree with scarlet blossom, bore down to the water's edge. There was a wild feel about it. There were snakes, and strange abnormal-looking insects, crawling slowly in that heat-soaked livid mass of green. At times a break in the undergrowth revealed a clearing, and twice we saw *avestruz*,* with their long necks and their perky heads cocked, listening, before they ran swiftly for cover.

Yacaré† drew the water in thin streams on either side of their savage jaws as they cruised slowly. Others lay sunning themselves on the clay banks, unmindful of our passing until our wash lapped muddily over their baking horny bodies.

Mosquitos swarmed in thousands, undefeatable; and now and then a pair of butterflies that at first looked like brilliant birds fluttered around us. The sun was a white harsh glare, but at evening it sank swiftly like a great crimson plaque of fire staining the waters blood red and leaving the sky suddenly to night. It was surprising how that sun went down without sizzling and sending up sheaves of steam.

All these things, the wild things that have been on the banks of the Parana since the world began, remain, but Mihanovich, with their steamers, electric fans, ice, cocktails and willing stewards, have drawn the fangs of the whole immense river system. I have lately talked with an old hunter who would not believe me when I told him that even an old lady might travel from Buenos Aires up the Alto Paraguay beyond the Gran Chaco to Corumba; to Salto Guayra on the Alto Parana—or for that matter right on through São Paulo and

* Rhea, or South American ostrich.

† Alligators.

out again to the sea. Twenty-five years ago that would have been a test of endurance that few travellers would have faced. Now you could take your grandmother.

But it is only *on* the river that there is security. It is still easy to imagine the terrors the early voyagers must have faced; the courage of the conquistadores as they followed this tortuous highway deeper and deeper into an unknown land; the wrong turnings they must have taken on these rivers that are always sending out great arms as big as themselves, some to rejoin them again, others to wander off to their own ends.

At San Lorenzo the river splits into two great streams enclosing an island that extends to Santa Fé, and from there four great arms grow, one the Salado, turning westward into Santiago del Estero, the Saladillo, north-west through Santa Fé, and the other two remain the Parana. It seemed impossible to know which way to turn.

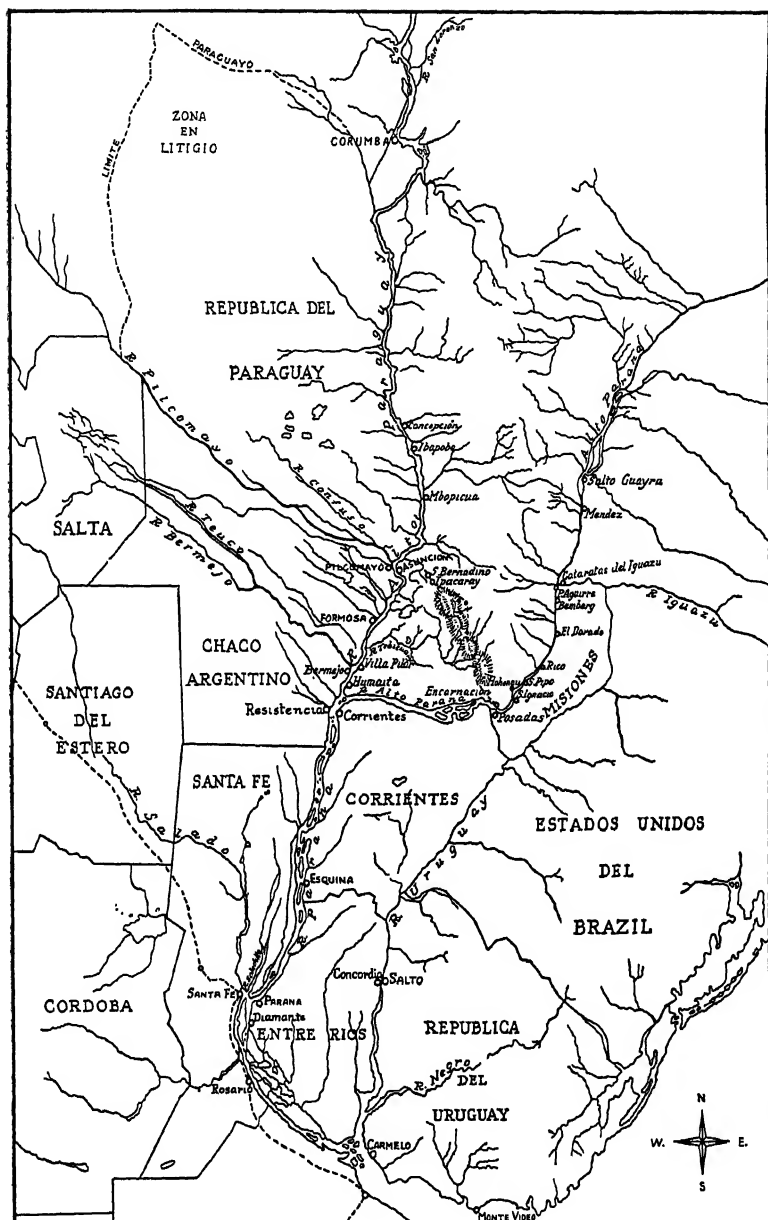
From Diamante the river grew wider and was dotted with a mass of islands extending to the old city of Parana, capital of Entre Rios.

"Does this river ever grow smaller?" asked Pat dismally. I said I supposed so, but without conviction. Five hundred miles is a long way up from the sea, and it was bigger than when we started. Nevertheless the main problem troubling me (and I have not yet settled it to my satisfaction) was the navigation. It was a puzzle by day; by night it was a miracle.

II. PARAGUAY

We first saw Parana as a cluster of yellow lights on a hill top far away eastward. This was the first rise in the ground we had seen and we could have greeted it with a shout. To the west the brighter lights of the town of Santa Fé twinkled over the river, and for more than an hour we twisted and turned amongst the islands.

At first we would have sworn that the lights of Parana were



RIVER MAP ISSUED BY MIHANOVICH, SHOWING PARANA RIVER SYSTEM.
CHACO MARKED REPUBLICA DEL PARAGUAY ; SHOWING ZONA EN LITIGIO

those of a country fair, and it was not until we were within a mile that the frill of lights, that had seemed to revolve on the central roundabout, revealed themselves as the outline of a cinema.

We could not see much but what we could see we liked. Tramcars crawled like illuminated beetles over the hilly streets, and the city seemed a succession of terraces and gardens hung with lamps. We also lost a number of fat mothers and their broods, and this alone would have endeared Parana to us.

The next morning high cliffs and low hills replaced the drab flatness to which we had become resigned. Giant tacuara ferns rose to a height of thirty feet curving from the banks, their stems as thick as a man's arms and growing so close together that the green wall they made was as dense as bricks.

But this wall of brobdingnagian ferns was not endless. There were tall curving cliffs of dull reddish earth holding crude adobe hovels in their folds, and the land, when we could see it, was richer and rolled away to a horizon faintly blue with low hills. This world had an end. There was rest for our eyes whichever way we chose to look.

Most of all, this land had a lived-in feeling. There were great areas that might have been the moon or another planet, in which we felt there was a deadness, a desertion; an expectation of nothing; and then there were places, equally wild—even more wild, for wildness had nothing to do with it—that had this lived-in quality.

To us the river beyond Parana seemed beautiful. There were trees rich with yellow blossom; trees with sturdy trunks as distinct from the impenetrable huddles of vegetation as tall as trees. Brown and white birds with wing spans of four feet sailed from bank to bank and let out occasional harsh croaks. And sometimes a carancho sat on top of a tree waiting for some animal to die so that he might get on with his cleaning.

Small tongues of sand pushed out into the stream and were

often carpeted with yellow butterflies as thick as primroses at the foot of a tree. Yacaré were numerous, and no longer drew me from my typewriter. I had found a quiet spot on the upper deck, and it was rather curious to be writing a story set in England; to be visualizing an English village, perhaps a row of cottages with mothers scrubbing their doorsteps and calling their children off the road.

And we would be edging sideways to the banks of Bermejo or some other odd little pueblo in the Argentine Chaco. Wild hordes of half-naked children would be surging towards us, stirring up the thick reddish dust with their bare feet, as though the dismal honk of our siren had evoked them from the earth. Stolid Indian women, with black shawls over their heads and cigars firmly in the corners of their mouths, would be standing around imperturbable as sphinxes, their eyes resting on us without the least sign of emotion.

These village children had now grown more vocal, chattering loudly; laughing; frankly delighted with the "great ship" and its people.

At Corrientes, the last town of the Argentine on the eastern bank, we lost the remains of our "provincials," and received in their stead a mighty monk and two priests in their straight black-skirted soutanes.

The monk was a prodigious man, fat as Friar Tuck, in heavy brown robes, with his tonsured head emerging from the folds of his cowl like a great pod. Inside these robes his body must have sweltered in a perpetual Turkish bath, but his face remained beatific. His appetite was immense, and meal times became for us periods of envious wonder—envious because we were both off our food. The eating of this monk was a non-stop process, and we felt that it was unfair of the company to provide only a knife and fork; a shovel or his own fat fingers would have been more appropriate. During these times of refuelling his expression was one of rapture. The mouth opened like a trap, the bulbous cheeks trembled, and down into the great sack of his body went the food. Pat

made a rough sketch of him, which, when discovered by the head waiter, created some sensation, for an intelligent remark or the display of any talent unconnected with the arts of love from a woman is a matter for astonishment in South America. She had earned respect. It showed itself in an improvement in the quantity of orange juice in her *naranjadas* (orange squash) and in the constant supply of soap in the bathroom. Such a woman should have service. It was no longer surprising that she should take a bath.

I packed up my novel at Corrientes. I dared not take the risk of plastering fat monks, women with cigars, and adobe huts over the English countryside. I had done enough to be sure of being able to keep my word.

We were in a new country; a small country with a strange blood-curdling history that is full of suffering and nobility; that was even at that moment in the thick of a war to safeguard the river we were entering.

At Corrientes the Parana forks, the right fork, the Alto Parana, turning eastward at right angles and continuing its course as the southern and eastern boundary of Paraguay, and on far beyond the rapids and cataracts of Salto Guayra through the heart of Brazil, while the left fork, the straight road, becomes the Paraguay river and winds on northward through Paraguay, Brazil and Bolivia almost to the Amazon.*

There was no longer a sameness in the country. At once, as we left Corrientes behind us, there was a difference. Even the Argentine Chaco still on our left bank seemed to have a characteristic air as though it were a blend of Paraguay.

In the early morning we came to Humaita with its Jesuit ruins at the waters' edge; red stone piled upon red stone by the passive Indians for the Jesuit fathers, and now crumbling and showing the blank sockets of great windows to the river.

The greatest change was in the people; in the women. Their rough straw-roofed huts were poorer, but there was a

* I believe it is possible to go right through and join one of the large tributaries of the Amazon, and so out to the sea at Para—not a trip for the grandmother, though.

natural pride in the bearing of the women; in their clear-cut faces with the short cigars in their mouths. They walked like dancers with a slight sway from the hips. The strain of their ancient Guarani blood was clear in them. They were peasants in a land of peasants: they were not simply the poor people: they were *the* people, and although in their dress and their cigars and colour they resembled almost exactly the women of the Argentine *pueblos* they were as different as the living from the dead.

Practically there were no men, and once more, as they had done in 1870, these fine women would have to pledge their bodies to the building of new stock.

It was from Humaita that Colonel Thompson had commanded the river and defied the Brazilian navy, while Lopez and his Madame Lynch skulked in their dug-out pursuing the atrocities and brutalities that at least served to reveal the Guarani as the most loyal and patient race on earth. This stretch of river had flowed with blood as the faithful Guaranis rowed out to attack their enemies, and stayed to die fighting rather than return to satisfy Lopez' lust for slaughter.

Just after dusk that day we came to Formosa, the last town of the Argentine on the left bank. It is a gay little town. Its girls, all in brilliant cotton frocks, swarmed down to the wharf to greet us. It was the end of the world we knew. Ahead of us lay "El ultimo Continente"—the Last Continent—and at dawn the next morning the "General Alvear" lay alongside in the lagoon of Asuncion, that city to which the Spaniards, driven from Buenos Aires by the Indians, had made their way and settled.

And opposite Asuncion, over the mile wide river a thousand miles from the sea, was the Gran Chaco, the great wilderness in which Bolivia and Paraguay had fought for nearly three years.

PART II

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST CONTINENT

I. WE ARRIVE IN THE LAST CONTINENT

WE interviewed the passport officers in the saloon before we dressed. Six o'clock in the morning is well into the day in Asuncion but it was early for us. The men were small, slim and intelligent. Their faces were well cut, with strong, straight noses, small mouths, and well-marked eyebrows curving over large dark eyes. We liked them at once. They were not just a variety of South Americans: they were a race.

A large official-looking letter addressed to His Excellency Dr. Don Eusebio Ayala, President of the Republic, released me swiftly from these preliminaries.

"Bolivia!" they exclaimed as they examined my passport. "You have come from there?"

"No—I'm going—later."

"Ah——" They talked softly and swiftly, glancing up at me. I was glad I had my letter to the President.

"You will stay at the Majestic?" they asked.

"Is it cheap—and good?"

They laughed, showing small even teeth. "Good, yes—and cheap for you with your Argentine money."

That somehow established good terms between us.

We dressed; paid our account in the saloon; had a final drink with the head waiter and the barman; tipped our steward, and landed in this Last Continent with exactly one hundred and thirty Argentine pesos. It seemed inadequate.

An armless man on the quay-side solicited our suit-cases. I was doubtful, but before I could ask how he proposed to

carry them he had looped them on a stout leather strap, using his teeth dexterously, and hung them from his shoulders with a cunning twist of the body. We had no difficulty with the customs. My letter again served.

We emerged from the customs shed into a wide, cobbled square and were immediately besieged by three men, the owners of three touring cars in the last stages of dilapidation. The tyres were bursting, showing frayed canvas linings and here and there a glimmer of pink inner tube; the upholstery revealed springs and tufts of horsehair.

I left it to the armless wonder to choose. No doubt he had some sort of working agreement in the event of some rich man like me arriving from the outside world.

"Majestic," I said, and he launched himself, complete with suit-cases round his shoulders, into the front seat, and was scarcely to be seen. Our trunk, brought by a tattered and torn, barefooted grandfather with half a yard of good straggly beard of no natural colour, was propped on the step by the driver and held by him with one hand. The engine gave a snort and roared like a machine-gun; we leapt over the cobbled square, bouncing like corks in the currents of the Parana, and round up a cobbled street between pink, grille-windowed walls.

It was a rough journey. The driver loosed the steering-wheel to change gear; the uneven cobbles took command of the bulging knobbly tyres; the driver fought an inclination to let go of our trunk with his right hand; got his gear in; grabbed the wheel.

Five minutes of sorting ourselves out of each others' laps, protecting our heads from the struts of the hood, clutching frantically at anything that appeared to give a hold, brought us to the Majestic.

"How much?" I asked.

"Two hundred pesos," said the driver, but I knew by the way he tried to appear casual that he was overestimating the joys of his amazing motor-car.

"Eh!—Oh—you mean Paraguayos," I said, getting my breath. "I'll give you two pesos Argentine."

He grasped the small tattered notes avidly. The armless wonder bowed almost to the ground as I handed him one whole Argentine peso, and then he jumped back into the front seat.

"Hell," I said, "we're rich."

But I had spoken too soon.

The proprietress of the Majestic was a German, wife of a traveller in Manchester (or from Manchester, or maybe only a traveller in Manchester goods. We never saw him and never got it straight). Her name was Cohen. She spoke a queer mixture of languages that Pat was ready enough to accept as English after the continuous Spanish of the river trip. Within five minutes, though it was barely eight o'clock in the morning we were drinking a concoction of orange juice and caña* with the exceedingly capable and cheery Señora Cohen and admiring her lounge. We thought this swift summoning of drinks was very matey of our hostess, but in reality I was paying.

The lounge was a kind of central winter garden, with a tiled floor, and large white plaster pillars supporting the second storey and leaving a large oblong central space that went up to the glass roof. There was not a great amount of glass in this roof, but it had not rained more than an odd shower in three years so there had been little inconvenience.

Round this central lounge were the bedrooms with tall double doors and stained-glass windows. The floors were of tiles right through, and wonderfully cool to walk on with bare feet.

Quite a little crowd gathered round us as we drank our cocktails at one of the wicker tables in the lounge. A bare-legged urchin with a boot-cleaning apparatus slung over his shoulder and a cap askew on his dark head hoped for business. I engaged his services. Another bare-legged urchin, slightly

* Distilled from sugar cane.

larger, folded his arms behind his back, stood on one leg and waited hopefully for something to turn up. A sleek young man with a pale mask of a face and curly black hair, who was the major-domo of the establishment, clasped his hands and slightly inclined himself in respectful silence. A fine strong barefooted woman, with toes that a footballer would have envied, and a blue smock hanging from her sturdy shoulders, crossed her stout brown arms meatily and took a general kind of interest in things. Two pretty girls, nattily dressed, the daughters of Señora Cohen, held the back of their mother's chair and looked pleasant. We felt honoured.

But I had an uneasy feeling that we were lambs for the slaughter; that all these, in their various ways, were speculating as to how many of my Argentine pesos might find their way to their pockets. Carefully I managed to detach an Argentine ten-dollar note from the skinny role in my hip pocket without producing the remaining eleven, and handed it to the pallid, expectant major-domo.

"Please change this," I said. "I haven't any Paraguayan money."

He bowed over the dirty note. The bare-legged urchin, working feelingly on my shoes, glanced up at the other bare-legged urchin who was now receiving the note with instructions to take it to the Banco de Londres. The washerwoman's—for that's what she was—dark eyes rested amiably on what represented two months' wages and a sufficient sum for a native to enjoy life on for at least a month. The two girls probably saw it as silk stockings. Señora Cohen recognized it as rent.

We were a happy little party.

Our bedroom, into which the whole party came, or peered, was spacious, and had a private bathroom. It was fortunate that the Majestic had not a suite, or was not let off in floors. We should have been unable to avoid taking one.

Within ten minutes, by the time Señora Cohen had shooed the spectators from our room, the small urchin returned with

a bundle of notes which the major-domo counted into my hand—700 pesos Paraguayan. It was just nonsense money. But it gave an illusion of wealth. I was about to reward the boot-cleaning urchin with some of the stuff when I caught the dismal look in his eye and ferreted in my pocket for an Argentine nickel 20-cent piece. The child departed, clucking.

Señora Cohen telephoned the Government Palace and announced my arrival. It was arranged that I should present myself to His Excellency the President at 11 a.m. Meanwhile the remaining urchin, not yet rewarded, led us triumphantly to the police and the military, chattering loudly as he did so.

II. WE ARE EXAMINED

Although it was now barely nine o'clock in the morning the temperature was soaring towards the hundred mark and the old quiet streets were drenched with burning sunlight. But at this early hour it was escapable, the sun still slanted broad shadows over the brown cobbles and there was a faint wisp of freshness remaining against the blank shaded walls of the houses.

The police and military authorities were housed in a long low building fronting a large unkempt plaza. The grass of the plaza was parched to a sombre greenish brown, and the palms, with their dead leaves hanging, threw long tufted shadows over the thick red dust of the pathways. Here and there a mango blossomed brilliantly, and the air had a heaviness, of heat and dust and smells. The squatting figures of a hundred market women fringed the square, facing the steps of the police department as though they were an audience for anything unusual that might happen. The hair of the younger women was jet black and strong, and dragged back to be wound into tight buns that jutted from the backs of their heads. Their faces were long, aquiline, and of an almost luminous brown. The older women all wore black scarves over their heads, and their faces emerged like dried

brown walnuts. All wore soft colours, faded pinks, and pale greens and mauves, and the cigar stuck in the corner of every mouth scarcely moved as they talked and laughed. All had baskets at their feet or held in the broad spread of their laps; some with oranges or pineapples, others with bread, and the horseshoe-shaped *chipa* cakes.

A few aged beggars squatted idly on the steps of the police building, or leaned against the round drab pillars that had once been white. I realized suddenly that nothing of this could be photographed; that nothing that was intrinsic in it would show. It depended on its soft colours, its dull red earth; its slow air of ruin; its heavy atmosphere and timelessness.

We followed our guide to an inner courtyard that had a fountain from which beggars and armless and legless men drank. The rooms opened out around this courtyard, and there was the occasional click of typewriters. Tattered and tired men and women sat about on wooden benches, waiting. Young soldiers in plain drab green uniforms talked in groups or marched up and down on the stone flags importantly. The officers wore military peaked caps and riding boots of various designs, while the private soldiers wore round linen pudding-basin hats with small brims like children's hats. None of them looked more than fifteen; their faces still soft and downy.

We had some precedence over the seemingly disinterested nondescript figures lining the courtyard. I presented my passport to a hawk-faced official. The examination began. It was complete.

A dozen times in the next two hours I thanked God that I had managed to edge in a telephone call and arrange the appointment with the President. Without it the police and military authorities might have gone on examining my facial and family peculiarities indefinitely. My passport astonished them.

I ferreted into my past; my forbears; my future. I

fastened tight on my present. Who and what was I? And what did I want? And why did I want it?

Bolivia. Bolivia! Bolivia!!

"Of course I go to Bolivia," I said smiling. "How else can I write of the war? Would you have them call me one-sided in England? Would you have them say 'this man sees only one side; of what value is his testimony?' "

They grunted.

"Morning Post—diario grande de Londres," I explained impressively. "Muy Grande!" I strove for a comparison that might mean something to them. It eluded me.

"Tee—mays?" suggested a knowledgeable man.

I clung to the straw: "Morning Post—Tee-mays igual," I said, and added with a sigh, "Mas o menos," making that small rolling gesture of the right hand back uppermost that goes with the words.

"England is not very friendly to us——"

"England is very sympathetic but she does not like war," I countered.

"It will be dangerous for you in Bolivia after here. . . . Those Bolivianos!"

"Ah—maybe," I shrugged heroically. "But it is necessary that I go in order to be fair to Paraguay."

They questioned me exhaustively about my father, my grandfather, my brothers. Had I not possessed brothers I should have felt bound to invent a few. They were not interested in my mother or my wife.

They examined me physically from all angles. I looked upwards and they stared from an oblique angle. They studied me for a long time in profile, three-quarter and full face. They looked steadfastly and long into my eyes, and searched abruptly behind my ears. They debated the exact colour of my hair. And all the time pens were scratching over foolscap sheets, noting me down to the last detail.

Presently they produced a large pad, soaked with black ink, and took my fingerprints.

Their expressions relaxed, they permitted themselves to smile. They handed me a towel that was stained black, a small piece of soap, and a bowl of water. We talked together pleasantly as I made abortive attempts to remove the black stains from my hands.

They bowed us out.

"You will be wise not to mention to anyone that you go to Bolivia, or to talk of Bolivia in public places."

We thanked them.

Our urchin was delighted with our importance, but we were not done with. A soldier escorted us into another room where the Chief of Police interviewed us sternly.

"Your League of Nations!" he said irritably.

"Pardon, señor," I corrected. "*The* League of Nations."

"Well, England does not help," he grumbled.

"Why should she help?" I asked bluntly.

He shrugged.

"I want to find out about this war, señor," I said earnestly.

"The Chaco is a long way from England. The English people know only what they hear, and that is not much."

"It is lies," he said.

"Then assist me to learn the truth," I said evenly.

A tall man with bristling moustachios strode into the room and glowered at me. "We are frightened of spies," he said.

"We must take precautions."

"Of course," I agreed. "But I am an Englishman, the guest of your country. At eleven o'clock your President receives me, and it is late now."

The man smiled glumly and said in English: "How is London? It is years since I was there."

We all relaxed.

"You'll find that we are hospitable. This is a time of war, and we consider that we have been badly treated by England and by English writers," they said, gravely courteous.

"I am sorry. I shall do my best to correct any wrong impressions."

We bowed and shook hands. They wished us well, and hoped that we should like their country.

There was just time to regain the hotel; wash; summon an execrable "auto," and drive to the Government Palace.

Pat sighed and lamented: "I might be a dreadful spy. They didn't take the least interest in *me*!"

"Your honesty is transparent," We clutched at each other in the lurching taxi.

III. THE PRESIDENT

The Government Palace keeps a semblance of prosperity, as threadbareness may hide behind a gold watch-chain. The lawns, fronting the two-storey central block of the Palace and partly enclosed by its two wings, are well kept and the driveways are free from weeds. The soldiers guarding the wide central staircase were brisk and neatly uniformed, but the plaster was peeling from the drab white walls of the large building, giving it an air of desertion. We had a feeling, as our heels resounded on the wide stone staircase, that we were awaking echoes of the past.

The past is so near in Paraguay. The terrible flame of its history of blood, misery, oppression and blind heroism has scarcely burned out. One by one the stones of this palace had been assembled by ten-year-old children while Francisco Lopez wallowed in the blood of their fathers, and raised this palace that his Madame Lynch might shine the brighter. We discovered that the building in which we had been so strictly examined had been his original house.

"The high heels of Lopez' boots had trod the stairs we climbed, jingling the heavy gold spurs of which he was so proud; the rustle of dresses had filled the wide balconies with whispering.

The President's suite was in the left wing of this building, now given over to government offices, and we walked slowly with a sense of the past very real in us, towards the tall double doors with the arms of Paraguay above them.

We were shown into an ante-chamber in which stood a large throne-like chair of gilt and faded crimson cloth, and three or four lesser chairs. Brass spittoons stood at intervals round the walls. From the one full-length window we looked out over the poverty stricken backyards of the neighbouring dwellings. Beneath us a woman urged a mule team; the hoofs of half a dozen steaming beasts scrabbling the slippery cobbles of the slight incline to the crack of the whip. There was an indefinable feeling of sadness; of a forgotten part of the world.

From this small ante-room double doors opened into an immense ballroom that occupied almost the whole of the large central block of the Palace. We tiptoed in, still with that feeling of awakening spirits of the past. There was a tremendous pathos in that room. It was an image of the vicious, childish pride of Francisco Lopez, striving to endow his tiny river country with the splendour of Versailles, striving to play the Emperor, strutting a measure in the grand manner which his small eyes had seen when he had toured Europe as his father's emissary and collected his French-Irish adventuress.

But it was a stately room. A faint breeze from the river stole through one of the half-opened french windows that lined the outer wall, and rustled the finely-cut glass chandeliers and set them tinkling like forgotten chords of music. Around the walls stood gilded chairs, the stuffing bursting from their faded crimson covers. Never have I stood in a room so empty and yet so full. It was like a tomb in which life is mummified, and will not awake again.

We walked quietly over the polished floorboards and looked out over the wide lagoon of Asuncion across the river that linked this small country with the world. Beyond the river the unbroken bush of the Gran Chaco lay like a brown haze to the horizon—on and on, until the great wall of the Andes set its limits.

And in the shadow of that wall the men of Paraguay were fighting and dying; fighting and dying as they had always

fought and died; not knowing when they were beaten, and going on, impossibly, to victory.

Three years before, the well-trained armies of Bolivia had threatened these very river banks on which we looked, expecting to occupy Asuncion within a week. Now they had their backs to the wall of their mountains in Villa Montes.

We walked quickly back to the ante-room, and presently the double doors leading to the President's sanctum were opened and His Excellency Dr. Don Eusebio Ayala came smiling with hand outstretched to greet us.

Dr. Ayala is a man of medium height, with something of the bearing of a soldier and the rotundity of a priest. There is a massiveness about him. His head is large, and there is a greyness in his face and in the close-clipped hair at his temples and on the high dome of his head. His features are decisive; a high broad forehead, and the straight large nose of his race over a deep-curving upper lip that gives a sententiousness to his speech and assists his irony.

After the preliminaries of welcome we took our chairs and settled down to talk. I had looked forward to this talk keenly. Ayala, I had been told, is a genius and a truly great man. Under him Paraguay will rise to prosperity. Don Alberto, whose familiarity with the leading lights of a dozen countries lent weight to his words, had said: "Take notice of Ayala. Wherever he had been born he would have risen to the top."

But Ayala had been born in Paraguay. . . .

His intense pride in his Guarani race was at once apparent in him: "You don't speak Guarani, of course?" he asked.

I regretted I did not. Guarani is the perfect passport to Paraguay. With his ministers the President still speaks Guarani in preference to Spanish. The whole race is bilingual, and a painstaking Englishman in Asuncion is laboriously preparing a dictionary of terms and a kind of "Hugo" course for aspirants.

At the time of our meeting the League of Nations had misjudged the war situation in the Chaco and had refused to raise the arms embargo against Paraguay while relieving Bolivia of restrictions. I knew little of the rights and wrongs of the matter at the time, and was not in a position to argue. I had not been in the country long enough to have formed any sympathies or to have gained any real knowledge of the Chaco trouble. But I resented the onus of everything being placed on England, and said so.

"We welcome serious writers here," said the President. "But we have had several English writers and journalists.* They enjoy our hospitality, stay for a day or two, and then write that we live in trees or some such nonsense." The President's full upper lips curved scornfully.

I sympathized. "My reputation," I said, "such as it is, has not been gained by writing nonsense."

The President assured me that he realized that.

"We enjoy visits from such men as yourself and Señor Webb, *The Times* Correspondent from Monte Video. We shall do everything possible to help you."

As soon as we had cleared these hurdles we talked seriously of the economic state of Paraguay, and of plans for the future. "We want men and money," said the President.

I kept silent. Men and money. Can any nation in the world have squandered men and money so freely! Only to-day in Europe are we beginning to know the meaning of the words "Dictator" and "Tyranny"; but Paraguay has learned them well through a hundred years of suffering. First, Francia, who built up her army and armaments so that his country might perish using them; then Carlos Lopez, who continued the work of oppression; and Francisco, his son, who brought their work to its natural fulfilment and destroyed every male above the age of fourteen years in his five years

* The President, Ministers, members of the English Colony and H.B.M. Ambassador complained bitterly of the abuses and asked me to combat them. All through South America I found all classes resentful of the utter distortion they had suffered, and the completely untruthful pictures of their countries.

war against Brazil, Uruguay and Argentine. And now the Chaco. . . .

"We must have population," said the President; "And that is not difficult. It is only difficult to choose from all those anxious to settle on our land."

A Japanese journalist was in Asuncion at the time, and was praising lustily the valour of the Paraguayan troops. Japan had a very serious eye on the country, and there was a scheme—a wild-cat scheme, I thought—to settle half a million Japanese migrants throughout the country.

But Ayala, diplomatically, sidestepped this possibility. Since his country must needs have an influx of foreign blood he was determined that it should be the right blood to mix with Guarani.

Meanwhile trade with Japan was opening out at the expense of England. The Japanese were supplying silks and cottons in metre lengths at the same prices as the English yards. In this small country, as in Argentine and Australia, England was throwing away goodwill and trade by refusing to study local conditions or to allow that any opinion could exist outside her own.*

We talked of the Chaco, but not of the war beyond a proud dismissal of the subject. "The war is far away now," said the President with a wave of his hand. "We have won. We have nearly thirty thousand prisoners in this country. The Bolivians are almost out of the Chaco."

But there were many peaceful works going ahead in this almost unknown territory. "We have five thousand Mennonites settled in the Chaco," said the President; "And we like them. They have three of their bishops here, and we give them complete freedom from war service, and freedom from taxation until they are firmly established."

* Trade: From H.B.M. Consul's report: "No special efforts on the part of United Kingdom Manufacturers to consolidate their position in this market have been observed, and these will have to be made if the present position is to be maintained."

In regard to Motor Vehicles: "The market is still open to British manufacturers who are willing to adapt themselves to local conditions." What a hope!

These Mennonites are a semi-religious sect drawn mainly from France and Canada, where their conscientious objection to war is highly unpopular. This seems to be the main plank of their religion. In the Chaco these people are settling down to a Spartan mode of life; tilling the soil; producing mandioca—the staff of life—cotton, tobacco and coffee. The missions provide rough but efficient schools for the children. It was already safe to say that the Mennonites would make a success of existence.

There were nine factories, Argentine and English owned, on the Chaco side of the river. For a hundred and fifty kilometres inland from Puerto Casado the Quebracho company runs its railroad, bringing in the hard red-wood timber which provides a quarter of the world's tannin supply and is one of Paraguay's most important exports. From points north of Casado to the banks of the Pilcomayo nearly 2,000,000 head of moderate quality cattle with a strong *criollo* strain graze on the huge holdings of Argentine and English companies, and the Liebig's works at Zepallos cue reduces herds of this stock to essence and sends it over the world in bottles.

But the populating of Paraguay proper was the subject on which we talked. At Villa Rica, in the fertile region of Paraguari, the Germans were already settling orderly colonies. At Hohenau on the banks of the Alto Parana near Encarnacion large numbers of White Russians thrived, and built roads and schools. There were more than 25,000 Germans settled throughout the country, and this number is considerable in a country numbering less than a million souls in which the women greatly outnumber the men.

The President spoke judiciously of German possibilities, and his upper lip spread over his mouth, and he leaned back in his chair. I learned that Adolf Hitler had large schemes to populate this fertile garden of South America, and that a scheme was reaching fulfilment whereby thousands of Germans each year would make their homes in Paraguay.

"We like Germans," said the President. "They are good settlers, hard workers, and good citizens."

"And the English?" I asked.

Eusebio Ayala spread his small hands. "The English . . . they organize . . . they manage . . . but——"

"They are not agriculturists," I supplied.

"Cinemas—amusements, there are none," explained the President. "The women must work with the men."

I had a glimpse of England's tragedy as I had not seen it until that moment. Through the months that followed, as I travelled over thousands of square miles of fertile country crying aloud for settlers, offering life to starving millions, I was to see it even more clearly. In Brazil, a country with a stretch of forest the size of all India, in Argentine, in the Beni country of Bolivia, in this whole vast continent that can absorb at least 300,000,000 more people, and then have its wide open spaces.

But not English people. Our millions live in factory towns, in mean streets, and these lands are for the peasants of Europe, the Italians, French, Germans, quick at learning the language, and understanding the customs; content with the bare simplicity of agricultural existence.

We cannot do it. It is not our fault that we cannot do it. We are a small country full of factories. We have only factories, and other countries will soon have factories too, as well as their lands.

Even in Australia our blood has failed. The Australians have built great cities in which they live on the rim of their vast country. Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Fremantle, Newcastle—all full of people, and the few in the interior support them all. Eight millions in a land that, in the words of their own experts, needs a hundred millions.

That is England's tragedy. We can build; we can organize; we can manage—but we are not peasants. Huge tracts of the world lie empty and fertile awaiting peasants.

"We like the English very much," said President Ayala.

"We have a very happy and loyal colony here in Asuncion. You will find them very helpful. Señor Cooper, the general manager of the railway, knows Paraguay as well as any man. I advise you to see him."

We prepared to take our leave; impressed that Paraguay was ready to build—when the war was over.

"All necessary passes will be sent to your hotel at once," said the President. "You will be enabled to go freely wherever you like. We are at your service."

I thanked him warmly. He wished us well, and hoped for another conversation in the near future.

"So things are going to happen in Paraguay," said Pat. "It's going to be interesting."

Our steps resounded on the wide stone stairway and the sentries saluted stiffly.

"Paraguay," I mused, "will be a German colony . . . in effect."

"A quarter of a million Germans settled here in the next twenty years will make a lot of difference," Pat agreed.

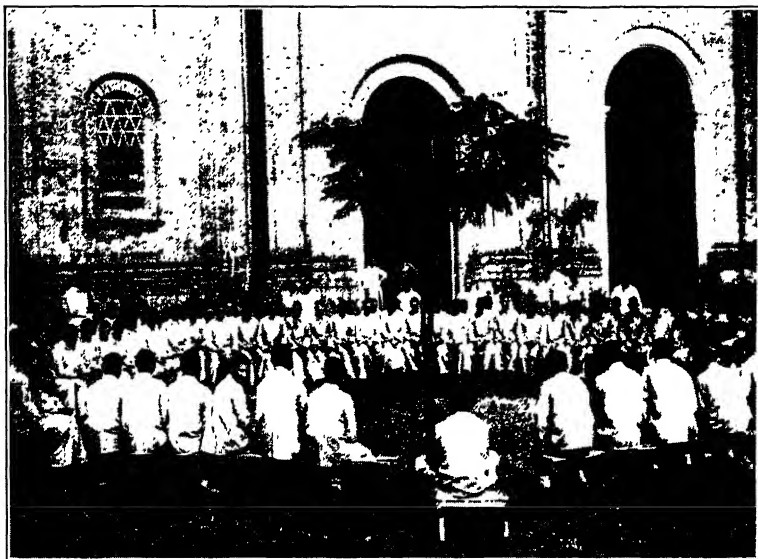
"Nice bloke—the President," I said. "Knows what he's doing."

IV. CITY OF SORROW

We walked back through the deserted streets to our hotel. Already at midday Asuncion was sleeping and there was no sign of life in shops or offices. At half-past three, when the sun had passed the zenith of its scorching intensity, the city would awake from its siesta and men and women return again to work.

We lunched frugally; not from any particular wish. There was a small piece of fish, bony and unpleasant, from the muddy waters of the Paraguay; a small piece of beef, tough and with many bone splinters to be avoided;* a pallid strip of mandioca that might have been appetizing mashed with

* Butchering as an art is practically unknown throughout the whole South American continent. This is mainly due to the very low price of meat.



CONVALESCENTS READY FOR A LECTURE

See p. 131



MILITARY HOSPITAL. YOUNG PARAGUAYANS ALMOST "FIT" TO BE KILLED

See p. 138

Facing p. 110

butter; and lastly, *queso y dulce*, a thin tablet of cheese with a similar tablet of sweet preserve. This last is inescapable; a national dish. Even the dessert fruit was poor, though the small green and blemished oranges were very juicy and sweet.

This, our first meal in Paraguay, told us plainly there was a war on. "In the hospitals," said the Señora, "they are very short of food. There is typhus all through the city. The men bring it back from the Chaco." And then she sighed. There was a kind heart within her sturdy bosom: "Pobre soldados. Pobre Paraguayos"—and almost inaudibly she added—"Pobre Bolivianos, also."

Always the sight of the bedraggled squads of prisoners plodding slowly over the street cobbles induced her sympathy. To me, accustomed to the terrible propaganda of European warfare, the hatred, the blood lust of ample-bosomed and otherwise gentle mothers, it was strange to hear in the streets: *Pobre Bolivianos*, on the lips of Paraguayans.

There was no hatred.

It emphasized the ghastly tragedy, the stupidity, and appalling futility of war.

In the afternoon, while the city indulged its siesta I wandered through the streets, wanting to be alone, my own master for a few hours, without plans. There would be plans enough to-morrow.

Brown tufts of grass sprang from between the cobbles of the streets and the flagstones of the narrow pavements. Clusters of young men sat at the windows of many buildings, peering out idly through the iron grilles at the almost deserted streets. It seemed that every other house was a barrack or a hospital. In most of them I saw rows of narrow beds, each with its occupant, wounded or whole, staring at the ceiling.

In this siesta hour there was a strong feeling of being in a deserted city; evacuated hurriedly years before. Here and there dogs that were nauseating in their pitiful leanness slunk furtively in the shadows or searched gutters for edible filth.

But there was a peacefulness in the old streets, a peaceful-

ness of decay and ruin, that was sad and beautiful. There was no freshness, no brightness; no hardness. The city had slowly faded. The bright colours of the old buildings that had once gleamed under the strong sun now blended their soft faded tones of pink, mauve, deep smoky green, grey and powder blue, and over low walls the dark leaves of mangos, or the scarlet blossoms of shrubs, showed in contrast.

I turned into Calle Palmas with its well-made road and good shops. There was nothing for sale that natives could buy. Clothes, toys, all things imported were marked in thousands of pesos.* A small child's pedal motor-car bore a card marked \$6,000—a small fortune. It could scarcely have been worth while for most of these shops to open.

I wandered on past the mellow red brick of the *Oratorio de nuestra Señora de la Asuncion*. For two years scaffolding had surrounded the cupola of this fancy of Francisco Lopez,† and one day repairs would be completed. Originally it had been intended that the dome should be gilded. So many things have been intended and begun in Paraguay—they will be finished *mañana*—always *mañana*.

Beyond the Plaza Independencia life had begun to stir; shutters rolled up, revealing the heaped merchandize of native shops and the Turkish quarter; rolls of silks and cotton from Japan; rough sandals and slippers of rawhide, and all the small goods of a market. Dark, bright-eyed girls, and hard-bitten grey old Turks invited sales, and I found that here money had some value. I bought a six metre length of white silk and a large rough leather suit-case for three hundred pesos.

By the time I had dragged myself from the market streets Asuncion was awake. Tall, well-built women bore heavy burdens, carrying their wares in round baskets, balanced on their heads, and walking with easy grace. They had a fine direct look in their eyes, and they were clean; the bare feet of

* The Paraguayan peso at par stands at 18.75 to the peso Argentine, itself now depreciated fifty per cent.

† The Oratorio is also known as Oratorio de Lopez. Lopez, it is said, was inspired by the Mausoleum of Napoleon I.

the women and children all seemed clean. Donkeys laden with large bundles bulging from their lean sides struggled over the cobbles, and often bore also the erect figures of their women owners on their backs. Trams rocked over the uneven rails that stood up like knives from the roads. Wagons drawn by oxen, or by as many as a dozen scrawny mules and donkeys, vied with trams and motor-cars for the use of the single tram tracks—for in this position only was the going reasonably smooth—and often it seemed that there must be collisions.

There is a rule about this, but it is a matter of nerve which of two approaching vehicles relinquishes the tracks to its rival and bounces over the cobbles.

I went back to the hotel, and found an old woman with an almost white and patient face, waiting hopefully to sell me Nanduti lace.* It was the most exquisite work; needle-run, and more delicate than anything I have ever seen. The woman had a small bag of stuff all made by her own hands. It was absurdly cheap but I dared not buy until the financial future was more secure. I told her I would take some of her lace home with me, and ordered a *mate* and a massive silver and gold *bombilla*.

By the time we went in search of afternoon tea in Palmas the main street was crowded. Almost every man wore the green uniform of Paraguay. The young men were lean, bright-eyed, alert, full of nervous energy and keenness. The city seemed to be full of soldiers; the hospitals full of sick and wounded. Sleeveless arms flapped at many a young man's side, and legless youths, their trouser legs pinned up, hobbled dismally on unaccustomed crutches that would be their legs for, maybe, fifty years ahead. . . . *we need men and money* . . .

For us this war was stripped of its glory, its cause, its impassioned speeches, its bugles and drums; we saw only maimed youths, and learned of thousands of others slaughtered, and of the enemy dying of thirst and fever in the green

* Nanduti—a Guarani word meaning white spider's web. It is thought to have originated in Flanders, thence to Spain, and so to South America where the Guarani Indian developed it.

hell of the Chaco. We saw it as an irredeemable horror, a senseless desecration of human life, a barbarism that could not have an excuse in civilized minds.

Fat-faced weary Bolivians, their uniforms tattered, their broad brown feet in rough sandals, marched slowly through the streets without attracting more than a casual glance. Paraguay, the President had told me, had more prisoners than it knew what to do with, 30,000 of them. They were like cattle; their moony Indio faces were without sign of intelligence and their eyes were dull and pitiful. It was not difficult to appreciate the whispered, half contemptuous "Pobre Bolivianos" on enemy lips. In contrast with the hawk-featured, slim Guaraní guards they seemed like dull and heavy oxen.

We found a café that boasted the only orchestra in Asunción, and sat down to tea feeling depressed. It was a city of sorrow.

That evening Señora Cohen had plans for us. With her daughters and their young men we climbed into two taxis, and tore off, swaying on the tram tracks, out of the city to Sajonia. Bolivian prisoners waited on us with fruit drinks and appeared to go about unguarded and to be treated with civility. Escape, had they wished to escape, was impossible. Their country, and their country's army, lay across the Paraguay river, and a thousand miles of jungle in which they died like flies.

Señora Cohen had hoped that we would bathe. There were several small changing sheds, and half a dozen youths splashed each other near the edge of the river. But Señora Cohen hoped in vain. With the setting of the sun the mosquitos had come down in clouds to feast on bared limbs, and the river seemed to us no place to swim.

"But aren't there *yacaré* and *pirhana*?" asked Pat, watching the splashing youths.

"Oh yes," said the Señora casually. "Pirhana not bad here, and *yacaré* are quite good-tempered."

"How do you know when they're good-tempered?" I asked. "Suppose you were to dive on one?"

"They might take a leg," said the Señora, unmoved; "but it is rare," she added. "Not dangerous."

Just one of those ordinary dangers like crossing the street, but somehow we felt that swimming was preferable without alligators, however friendly, and that some kinds of mixed bathing make no appeal to us.

It was very pleasant at Sajonia. There were two or three hard tennis courts, and a club of sorts, and there was freedom from the oppressive heat that enveloped the city. At nine o'clock we sped back along the tram lines into Asuncion bound for the indoor cinema, and were astonished to find the fare for the taxi was less than that charged for the short journey from the docks to the hotel in the early morning. There was a special set of travellers' prices until one got wise.

For 150 pesos all six of us were admitted to the best seats in the body of the old theatre, but that was a high enough price to keep most people away. Heavy cobwebs festooned the roof and skeined the large wooden fans that must have failed to fan for some time. A few young officers took their seats and saluted us smartly, their quick eyes gleaming on us with swift interest. There were seats also at \$5, and these drew twenty or thirty people, young native girls with their mothers, very sedate and dressed mainly in black.

By the end of the first picture it seemed strange to us that anyone troubled to come at all. It was an American film, quite an average product, spoken in North American with the Spanish dialogue shown on the lower part of the screen. The translation was inadequate and failed entirely to convey the spirit of the film. No translation could have done that.

The slickness of the American expressions made the picture entertainment, and to the audience, even to Señora Cohen who knew English, this dialogue was quite unintelligible. "O.K., big boy," would be rendered, "*Muy bien, amigo.*"

And since the sound counted for very little the management did not bother about it and it was a wild blare.

I said to the Señorita Cohen at my side: "You are badly served with films. You don't understand this, señorita?"

She pouted sadly: "Some are better than others; singing ones, and we have some Spanish pictures in the open-air cinema. They are not very good, and you can only hear them in between the passing of the trams outside."

But in the interval there was a new eagerness in the small audience, and presently the lights dimmed again, and *El Raton Mickey* flashed on the screen. The sedate young girls were already giggling, and before Mickey and Minnie had fairly begun their antics shrieks of laughter shook the cobwebs. Walt Disney's creations surmounted the barrier of language. Mickey was international. The thought came to me that if Bolivians and Paraguayans could be shown Mickey in the same cinema they would all laugh together and would not want to fight. War and dictators bar laughter as their greatest enemy. Laughter is an enemy of war and dictators.

It had been a long day, and by the time we had taken something from Señora Cohen's very last bottle of Scotch whisky we were ready for bed. I went out on the balcony of my room and looked over the flat roofs of the city. I thought of the President in his palace with the peeling walls; of the Chaco in which guns were flashing death to soldiers. An occasional tram rocked over the rails noisily, and from a dozen different belfries old mellow bells chimed the quarters during a full five minutes. Two bells nearby were cracked and hollow-sounding, but that seemed fit. Now and then a car with open exhaust roared over the cobbles.

Nevertheless we were soon asleep and did not hear the thunderstorm that presently flooded the winter garden. It was the end of our first day in the old sad mother city of South America, that had somehow been left behind, city of yesterday and—mañana.

V. ASUNCION'S "BIG WHITE CHIEF"

We expected to find Señora Cohen bristling with wrath on account of her flooded lounge. "Ha—the good rain!" she crowed, and, half aside, "I must really have that roof repaired."

Meanwhile two bare-legged boys swept the water in waves before them and urged it to flow down small drain gratings in the stone floor.

With our legs up on chairs in the driest part we drank coffee and listened to Señora Cohen extolling the virtues of rain and lamenting the terrible need of the country. All the fruit crop had been spoiled; the oranges green and small, as we had seen; gardens everywhere in the city dying. For three years the drought had kept up; delaying river traffic, so that steamers had to load and unload into lighters out in the lagoon without coming in to the wharves.

"As if the war wasn't enough!" complained Señora Cohen.

Our coffee stowed, we walked to the railway station in search of Mr. Cooper, the railway chief. The railway station, a long low building of many pillars and ragged beggars, had been built by Carlos Antonio Lopez, and it is one of the prides of Paraguay.

The F.C.C.P., begun in 1854 and opened as far as Paraguari in 1861, was the first railway line in South America. Since then it has extended across Paraguay to the Alto Parana at Encarnacion, and links up with the Argentine by ferry at Posadas. The original construction was undertaken by two English engineers named Valpy and Burrell with three battalions of infantry to do the work. Mr. Valpy, who must have been in Paraguay through all the five years' war and the horrors of Francisco Lopez, and must have had a story to tell, also supervised a second section to Villa Rica, opened in 1884.

Soon after that date the contractors failed financially and

nothing more was done until 1907. In 1913 the first International train ran from Asuncion to Buenos Aires. Various short branch lines have been constructed since, but the F.C.C.P. remains primarily a strategical line to join Asuncion with the Argentine in the shortest possible distance without regard to the opening up of the country.

This explains why it is a difficult and long job to see much of Paraguay and what is happening. Practically speaking there are no roads, and travel must be by horse, mule, bullock wagon and river. It takes time.

We found Mr. Cooper in his office; a well-built Englishman with thin sandy hair and a smile of welcome that ousted a somewhat sad expression.

"How long have you in Paraguay?" he asked.

"A few weeks at most," I said.

Mr. Cooper groaned.

"You can't see Paraguay in a few weeks. It takes years on mules and bullock wagons."

We perceived that he had a grouch. It was simply that of a man who has lived for the best part of thirty years in a country and realizes how little he still knows. "You fellows expect to come here for a few weeks, and then go home and write all about it."

"Not *all* about it," I said quietly. "Just what we know, and have seen, and learned."

Then he let go his particular grouch. It concerned a writer who had travelled across Paraguay in the train with him, played bridge all the way with the window jalousies up, and then written a book on the country.

I sympathized, but I explained that if it was necessary to live thirty years in a country before writing about it there would not be many travel books. All the entertainment and valuable information supplied by such men as Mr. Evelyn Waugh and Mr. Peter Fleming would not have been available. Even I had written several books that had been adjudged reasonable by the inhabitants of the countries concerned.

Mr. Cooper relaxed, and became a helpful and obliging friend. In common with consuls, railway chiefs and public men throughout the South American continent, he was furiously annoyed with the whole tribe of authors on account of the doings of certain of them. Mr. Cooper gave me freedom of the railway; advised me that to know the country thoroughly would be impossible; that almost all important development was well away from the railway track.

"You will learn most," he said, "by talking to old residents in Asuncion, and by taking a trip out to San Bernardino. That's my advice for a short stay."

He grew lyrical about latent possibilities. He loved Paraguay; was happy in his quiet way in his luxurious flat above the station, listening to London on his magnificent short wave radio receiver; thinking of his wife and grown-up daughters in Berkshire; inspecting his orange grove; making longed-for trips into the huge yerbales* in which he had a financial interest; and indulging his favourite sport of fishing for dorado in the Paraguay river. He was a recluse, content in his exile, and used to his own company.

When he thawed he was altogether charming. His knowledge and appreciation of the country were even greater than one would expect from a man who had prospected railway lines for thirty years. He was the leader of the small British colony, and the most important man, next to the President, in Paraguay.

"Everything grows here," he said; "citrus fruits, bananas, coffee, rice, cotton, mandioca, yerba, and still in this tiny country there are thousands of square miles of almost virgin forest full of excellent timber." He grew glum again. "Useless without transport."

"And cattle?" I asked.

"Poor," he said, and laughed drily. "Roughly one a week first quality, worth about ten pounds."

"How come?" I asked.

* Natural forests of Yerba maté.

"About once a week the International train is said to run over a cow. I get a writ. You would think only grand champions in an English dairy show could inspire some of the letters I get. But you don't see any of these beautiful cattle about. . . . We pay, of course," he added. "Nothing else to do."

He was proud of his railway. In spite of the war and the terrible handicaps, the appalling exchange, he was thinking always of development. The government attitude, and this applies in Argentine, was: You have put the railroad down, and you cannot take it away. We will let you pay a dividend one of these days—perhaps.

The general manager shrugged. "You cannot abandon a railroad. They know that." All public services, trams, telegraphs, trains had been hit most severely by the war and the depreciated currency. The fares remained practically as they were before the war. If they were put up, ninety per cent. of the population would not be able to travel; freights would not be freighted. Fares were ridiculous in terms of English pounds or Argentine pesos. We could cross Paraguay for a few shillings, and we found out that the journey from Puerta Esperanza across the whole continent of Brazil to Santos, taking, I think, five days, could be done for thirty shillings. The tram fare from end to end of Asuncion was 10 cents—no money at all—and from this I learned that there had been a ramp in nickel money. It was worth more for melting than its face value, and enterprising people bought it up in sack loads and shipped it down to Argentine. The government were punching out some aluminium stuff in the arsenal to combat this. Meanwhile stamps served as small change.

The general manager had just returned from a long journey to satisfy himself on colonial development. He was lyrical about the German settled country in the Paraguari and Villa Rica regions, and the White Russian colony at Hohenau in the Jesuit territory. "They're doing wonders," he said. "Already they've built good roads within the colonies. They

have schools, hostels—cinemas, even. We'll be increasing business, putting out lines to them, maybe."

He had also seen El Dorado and Victoria, the extraordinary Schwelm enterprises on the Argentine side of the Alto Parana in Misiones. News of these, very vague and mostly inaccurate, had already filtered through to England.

"You've *got* to see those colonies," said Mr. Cooper.

He searched in his desk and found some papers. "Look here, I'll lend you this. I've made a full study and a report. Take a copy and let me have it back."

I accepted the report eagerly and promised to visit the colonies. I was going to cross Paraguay and continue on up the Alto Parana to the Iguazu river anyway.

It had been apparent for some time that Mr. Cooper was bursting to let himself go on another subject. Once or twice he had extolled the heroic Paraguayans and cursed the League of Nations.

"The League of Nations. An utter disgrace!" He said angrily. "I tell you, Thompson, this country's had a bad deal, but she's done marvels. No army, man! Yet she's won. She's got 'em on the run."

"We're anxious to hear all about it," I said. "We shall be delighted if you will dine with us to-night."

Mr. Cooper promised that he would, and we took our leave in search of Ministers of Economics and Foreign Affairs.

"I wish we had months instead of days, old lass," I said.

"This place is beginning to intrigue me."

"Perhaps we can manage a bit more time," Pat hoped.

"It's a question of money. We're going to be in an awkward spot in about three days from now. We've got at least ten thousand miles to travel before we go home, and less than eighty pounds to do it on, including living for four months more."

"We'd better get out of Asuncion then," said Pat.

And we entered the office of the Minister of Economics.

CHAPTER VII

ASUNCION

I. MAINLY PEOPLE

WITHIN an hour of leaving Mr. Cooper I realized that I was not having a holiday in Asuncion; appointments began to crowd the days. There were ministers and sub-ministers; colonels and captains; consuls and the necessary social round. And at each visit I accumulated a stack of pamphlet literature that soon filled my new suit-case and sent me down to the Turkish quarter for another.

I was free to go where I liked. The President had kept his word in regard to passes, and Don Luis Riart, the Foreign Minister, and Villa Reco, the Assistant-Minister for War, supplemented them, so that I had an impressive collection of documents. With everyone I met, English and Paraguayan alike, Paraguay was a passion.

With the Minister of Economics, a jolly farmer-like man with a thick halo of curly black hair crowning a ruddy face, I studied maps of the region east of the Tebicuary river that cuts Paraguay in half from south to north. "There," said the minister, planting a stout forefinger on the map, "we shall find minerals."

I was dubious. Paraguay probably has the most fertile soil in the world, but it has no wealth, no poverty, no starvation, at least, no misery. I found it hard to believe there were minerals in any quantity.

The Minister produced a number of phials and small pots containing gold, copper and other minerals obtained from the eastern region. "I have prospectors," he said, "covering every inch of the territory. I am confident. These samples have recently arrived."

With Luis Riart I talked of the war. "We will have a government launch to take you to Villa Hayes. There you will inspect hospitals and prisoners. You must also see our Paraguayan meat works at Piquete cue beyond the Peñon rock. We have six hundred prisoners working there."

"... And the war?" I said.

Luis Riart, whose heavy-jowled, swift-eyed features are probably better known than those of any other of Paraguay's ministers because of the part he took in arranging the final armistice, sat upright on the settee beside me. His face is heavy, the jaws firm and obstinate; his small bright eyes fastened on me suddenly.

"It is far away," he said. "We are pushing them back in the Santa Cruz sector. We have won!"

"Stalemate, is it not?" I ventured.

He spread his broad hands.

"Peace?" I asked.

The enigmatic Riart shrugged his massive shoulders. "We are strong now," he said; "Stronger than we've ever been. Negotiations are progressing all the time."

"You want an indemnity, of course," I said.

Luis Riart smiled for the first time, but all he said was—
—"Ha!"

The Ministers for War, the Estado Mayores, and the officers of the Ministry, were charming. Not to be outdone, they presented me with more passes. Of war propaganda there was none. There was no need for it. Paraguay was already a victorious nation, but there was a tension with the Ministers. The enemy, after three years, were back on their bases, and the Paraguayan army, under the able and idolized young Marshal Estigarribia, was hundreds of miles from the Paraguay river and home. It was felt that a real victory at Villa Montes was impossible, and the fighting along the Parapiti river in the sector of Santa Cruz was more intense and deadly than any in the whole war. For all her extraordinary success Paraguay could not, and did not wish to, invade. There was a feeling in

high quarters that Estigarribia (at least, that was my impression: it will probably be denied), once the enemy had been pushed back across the Parapiti, should cease his great attacking drive and wait.

It seemed like stalemate to me. But the army was flushed with success and determined on a decisive victory at Villa Montes at all costs. That would write finis to the tale of three years and a hundred thousand dead.

So there was no real hope of peace in the people. They were resigned—another year—two years, *tal vez* . . . it goes on. Who knows?

There was no weakening of morale; and the arms problem had been solved by the enormous captures from the enemy. There was a two years' supply of arms in Asuncion, nearly all of it taken in that way and I witnessed the extraordinary sight of rejoicing in Asuncion on receipt of news that Bolivia had received fresh supplies. "Now we shall have the very latest weapons!" roared the people.

Apart from the fact that no one had been able to buy any new clothes for three years there was no real hardship. To starve is impossible in Paraguay. A hectare of land costs about two shillings and sixpence, and it grows everything without more than a dreamy attention. Sling in a few seeds, swing a hammock, smoke a leaf of fine tobacco rolled into a cigar on a beautiful woman's thigh, pluck an orange, a pineapple, a banana, boil some mandioca, drink caña, and be happy. Simplest thing on earth if you don't feel life is bound up with picture palaces and what not.

Mr. Cooper really launched us into the war. He was a fierce supporter of Paraguay, and I soon realized that no country could wish for more vehement propagandists than the English colony in Asuncion. They deluged me with facts and arguments.

Against Bolivia's German-trained force of 80,000 men, armed with the finest weapons money can buy, officered by Germans and commanded by the German General Kundt, Paraguay had

sent a rabble of 3,000 men, without uniforms, unshod, unarmed but for machetes and ancient Argentine rifles. Since the first shot had rung out at Pitiantuta the deeds of the Paraguayans under Estigarribia had been stupendous. The whole story of the war is an epic.

Mr. Cooper gave me figures of arms captured, and I checked these figures from other reliable sources. There were 49,000 rifles, 4,000 machine-guns, 400 mortars, and millions of rounds of ammunition. But there were many other statements more difficult to check. All Paraguay was convinced that the Standard Oil Company of Bolivia had financed the war. There was oil in the Villa Montes region, and it probably followed the fall of the land along the Pilcomayo. When the Standard Oil company had done their prospecting they had found that their concessions from Bolivia were worthless, because the Chaco was not Bolivia's to sell. They had said simply (this is the story): "We've paid for it. Give us the money back. Or, if you can't do that, better make it yours. Paraguay hasn't an army or money."

At any rate, they wanted a pipe line through to the Paraguay river. Hence the war. It sounded reasonable, and few people bothered to look any farther.

The rumours were wild. It was said that since Paraguay had shown her mettle Shell-Mex had come into the reckoning on her side. The seconds arranged themselves easily: Chile, Peru, Brazil and S.O.C.O.B. for Bolivia. Argentine and Shell-Mex for Paraguay.

The case and probability seemed very good, but I could not accept anything. I was more than ever determined to reach Bolivia and hear what the people there had to say. But it was certain that Argentine financed Paraguay to some extent—it was said at the rate of 1,000,000 paper pesos a month. Paraguay had no money at all when the war began, and uniforms and outside food supplies had to be paid for.

The oil story enjoyed belief in Argentine, even with the newspapers. Huey Long had made definite accusations against

S.O.C.O.N.Y. and even the Chase National Bank in the United States. I believed it myself, but I had to check.

The Standard Oil had paid \$8,000,000 (U.S.) to Bolivia for their concessions, and wanted to see some of it back.

"Call it help; call it a fair price; call it what you darn well please," said the English in Asuncion. "We call it financing the war."

The most serious rumour of all was a direct accusation against the United States government. The Bolivians, quite definitely, wore United States army uniforms complete with regimental buttons, and in support of United States aid was the fact of her commercial interests in Bolivia and the undoubted mess she had made of the peace efforts under her guardianship.

Mr. Cooper and others got really warmed up about this. "The most disgraceful diplomatic muddle in history!"

The United States appointment of the South American States under her thumb as arbitrators had sent a wave of anger through Paraguay and the Argentine.

I began to feel that I was in a maze, that this "little war" in a "swamp" that nobody seemed to know anything about, was a vastly complicated business, and I was determined to probe these things to the best of my ability. No one yet had visited both countries during the progress of the war, and I had an idea it would repay my trouble.

Of these facts I was convinced: Paraguay's weakness on the outbreak of hostilities; Bolivia's strength and preparations under the war-like President Salamanca; Paraguay's ownership of the eastern half of the Chaco.

I ferreted out all about the old agreements of sale and lease of the territory to English and Argentine companies, dated from 1880; and these treaties had been published to the world without complaint from Bolivia or anyone else. Fifty years after seemed a little late to claim the whole Chaco, including the litoral of the Paraguay river. There was not the least doubt as to the aggressor, yet the League of Nations had not been able to make up its multiple mind.

Bitterness against the League was intense and justified, on the part of British residents and Paraguayans alike. The League had blundered badly, and, of course, that meant England.

Mr. Cooper opened this barrage, as it were, and it was carried on with fervour and enthusiasm by every Englishman I met. Next to nothing had been written in the world's newspapers, and the little that had been written had put certain Englishmen in danger of apoplexy. They felt that at last they had their mouths to the megaphone in me.

How disappointed we were all to be we had yet to learn; for the Italo-Abyssinian affair was to render all my journey abortive and make the financial difficulties present at the birth of my rather desperate venture a dream of solvency that seemed impossible of reattainment.

II. DON FEDERICO TAKES US UNDER HIS WING

It was on Mr. Cooper's advice that we called on Don Federico. He occupied an office with a Paraguayan-Scot by the name of Roldan, exactly opposite to our hotel. He is a small man with a large heart, and a fount of service to others that appears inexhaustible.

Don Federico is to some extent a cripple, but with tremendous courage he works to put that "is" into the past tense. His courage, like his heart, is large.

He welcomed us, looking up swiftly, as the semi-paralysis of his neck compelled him. There was something bird-like in the swiftness of his glance that had a quality of perpetual surprise. He spoke rapidly with a "no" at the end of almost every phrase whether in Spanish or English, so that he soon had us "no-ing" with him. Spanish does this to some Englishmen.

"You want to see all you can, no?"

"Yes," we said.

"I'll help you, no. Roldan will show you round, no?" His eyes flicked over the tall, dark, silent figure of Roldan, who

had sat immovable as a statue and now showed a fine set of teeth in a smile.

"Seguro," said Roldan.

"Understands English, no? Won't speak it, no? Scotch accent, no? Scared people 'll laugh at him, no?" rattled Don Federico, bewilderingly.

"Yes," we agreed breathlessly and Roldan grinned broadly, and looked as coy as a man of six feet two inches, and broad in proportion, can.

Don Federico, at the moment of our call, was busy. He gave us some advice as to what was worth seeing and asked us to come back. We asked him to dinner.

"We'll go to the yerba mill first, no?" I said.

Roldan's deep voice rumbled in: "There's a murder trial to-day."

Don Federico's eyes glowed.

"You must see that, no?" He turned to Roldan: "That fellow who murdered a family, no? Been in prison twenty-three years, no?" His eyes shot back to us: "Peculiar, no—last five days at least, may be, no."

"Si," said Roldan.

We left for the yerba mill, and arranged to see the murder trial with Roldan later. At the mill we saw the yerba leaves and twigs being ground into powder and clumped heavily into neat sacks. We received joyfully ten kilos of the finest yerba, sufficient to see us through twelve months in England.

Walking back we wandered into the emporium of the white-bearded and venerable M. Rochelle, whose collection of Paraguayan animals, birds, reptiles and insects is unequalled. As a taxidermist M. Rochelle is perfection. He has stuffed a frog from the Chaco for me, magnificently, and his shop is almost terrifying. Practically all the one hundred and twenty odd varieties of Chaco snakes appear to writhe in life. And spiders....

Watching small alligators hatch, and other things of absorbing interest, we almost missed the start of the murder trial. Roldan was champing restlessly when we reappeared.

"Ha! So you went to Rochelle? Wonderful, no?" said Don Federico. "You must see Marsal's work too."

Pat went up to the hotel, and Roldan and I pushed our way into the large oblong hall of justice in which this murderer of a complete family stood trial for his life. I do not get a thrill from seeing a living corpse, but only a feeling of shame that men must indulge in the sadism of a trial and turn the death of a murderer into a spectacle.

The sight has left a passing impression. The court room opened from a large courtyard from which people might pass freely. Small groups stood about chatting and a small crowd wedged the opening of the court room. There were no doors. I followed Roldan through the crowd. The twelve jurymen sat at small tables facing each other across the court. The judge occupied a chair on a dais commanding the court. The whole central space was open. There were easels with boards for counsel to demonstrate and draw diagrams. The prisoner sat on an ordinary wooden chair and seemed disinterested. Ushers stood behind the jurymen, their duty being to keep the jury awake through the long proceedings.

For here is the extraordinary thing about a trial in Paraguay: it goes on until it is finished without adjournment through days and nights. Until a verdict is reached the court sits; jurymen's heads loll over their desks and are brought jerking to wakefulness by smart taps from the ushers. The prisoner himself dozes fitfully.

We did not stay long. Interest would work up later.

I learned that the Paraguayans do not believe in the death sentence. They say they do not see how killing the murderer will help the murdered. They know a murderer, especially a murderer in hot blood, is not a criminal or even a bad man. And if he should be a real bad man and murderer his friends take care to warn the jury how to vote, and they mostly shrug their shoulders, glad of an excuse to leave the bad man his life in exchange for their own.

"Prison," said Roldan, "is worse than death in Paraguay.

Most men would prefer death. They say there is no crime that two years in an Asuncion prison does not wipe out. It is a living death."

The verdict is given by majority vote. The judge only comes into it if the votes are equal. In this event it is extremely rare for a judge to come down against the prisoner. The judge reasons: if there are equal numbers for and against there is an even chance the man deserves to escape (not that he didn't commit the crime). Add to that the very strong fact that the judge would receive the complete blame for the sentence and might easily find a sharp knife between his ribs, and the judge's decision is easily reached.

This trial turned out to be quite exciting. Four times during the second night the lights of the city failed, and the court room was thrown into a panic in the pitch darkness. There was slight humour, too. One of the jurymen wore dark glasses so that it was hard to know whether he was asleep or awake. It is certain he slept through long stretches of the trial unnoticed, and, in the final verdict of seven to five against the prisoner, I cannot help wondering if the prisoner's life actually hung on some of the evidence given while this black-spectacled man was sleeping. He might have made it six all had he heard, and the judge would have left it at that.

However, the prisoner died.

Meanwhile we had several days of happy wandering around Asuncion with the ever-helpful Don Federico, who seemed to have made us his especial care. With him we were introduced to the exquisite clay modelling of Marsal, and we longed for the money to make a small purchase. The perfectly coloured and natural figures of Paraguayan market-women live. There are imitations, but there is only one Marsal.

In small boliches,* while sipping our caña and nibbling peanuts, we saw a fresh-complexioned little old man with white hair. He was an Englishman and had been beachcombing on the river for thirty years, cadging drinks from anyone who

*Drinking bars.

would pay for them. Now he was telling jokes to the Paraguayan soldiers and drinking with them. The sight of him irritated us and we escaped to the English store of Willie Hayward.

Old Willie Hayward had a story. He is a white-haired old London cockney; still a cockney after forty years in Asuncion; a curious, enigmatical old man with something fine in him. Forty years ago Asuncion was a wild place for a London cockney; a place where the odds were unlimited against success. You would say that Asuncion was the worst of all places such a man could choose. Goodness knows why Willie chose it. A Paraguayan wife chose Willie. Males were in demand in the 'nineties and Willie was not unattractive.

When we visited his shop, young thirty-year-old Willie junior, was managing. Dad was poorly, he told us. It is a small shop with a big business; the only place in Paraguay where you can buy English cigarettes—if you want them. They carry an impuesto of \$350 pesos a tin, and the native cigarettes, perfectly made from the best black tobacco in the world, are \$10 pesos a packet of fifteen. They were nine cents before the war.

Don Federico really showed us something of Asuncion and its quaint characters. He knew everyone and everyone knew and liked him. But he lived alone and kept to himself.

There was something intensely likeable about Don Federico, and something mysterious. Almost there was a sense of tragedy, or perhaps pathos, tempered by his own rather sardonic humour. Above all was the courage of the man, and that was big enough to drive away any first feelings of pity we might have had. He had an intense pride in his partially paralysed body. He studied his diet carefully and devoted set hours of the day to exercises of his own devising, and to sun-bathing. His spirit was indomitable, and we guessed that he had suffered some misfortune that would have been the end of most men.

"Poor old Federico," people would say guardedly, "would do anything for anybody."

His arms were like iron, and his head would twist sideways so that his alert eyes met mine as I felt his arm.

"Like good timber, no?"

He was defying whatever it was that had smitten him down but was always conscious of it. His life had become a fight against his infirmity, and he seemed to find it exciting.

Don Federico had taken root in Paraguay more firmly than anyone else we met. He understood the country and loved it—not with the full-voiced enthusiasm of others but with a quiet, sage understanding. He had ceased to be an Englishman thinking of home. This was his home. He spoke of Paraguay softly and diffidently, as though it might have been a child he loved.

"This red soil," he would say. "Wonderful. . . . No? Everything grows, everything springs up from it, richly." His hand would grip hold of a luscious pineapple, or caress the great thick livid blade of a banana leaf. "From a little seed. . ." And his chin would struggle up from his breast and his swift eyes flicker over the timbered hills: "Live-giving soil . . . there is none like it, no!"

In his quiet way Don Federico had decided that we should know and love Paraguay. He took charge. Always considerate, always full of suggestions, always inescapable.

"Don Tomaso, you must see the radio, no? A very good little station. The señora would like it, no?"

"I would love it, Don Federico," Pat said.

Together we bundled into a taxi and roared off over the tram-lines down the broad tree-lined Avenida Colombia, and the equally pleasant Avenida Espana, with the fine houses set in the shade of palm-trees and mangoes.

I do not understand the first thing about radio. I have a brother who used to litter our house with wires and valves in the early days when, after hours of sitting hunched up with earphones, and much twisting of knobs, a voice would say—"¿O Don calling. I'm going to play the piano." ¿O Don, who for a long time was nothing but a mysterious voice from

nowhere, was a bank clerk named Symonds and one of the first great men in radio, would then play his piano.

Similarly my ears were assailed with wireless jargon, with grid leaks, oscillations and the like, before I entered my teens. So I am going to call the small square brick house in a field outside Asuncion the "power station." It probably was not anything of the sort.

There were aerial masts in the field, and a young man my brother would have liked (probably there is no language difficulty amongst radio specialists) attended to his valves, switched his switches, and talked the kind of stuff that comes as second nature to his tribe and means less than Chinese to me. Don Federico's eyes sparkled in the background while I assumed the outward appearance of intelligent interest. I was much impressed by the gleaming ebonite (?) panels. I was more impressed when the broadcast in progress was switched on in the power house, and a voice said:

"We are now about to play music in honour of Senor R. W. Thompson, 'el distinguido periodista Inglés' now inspecting our plant." The voice continued: "Also in honour of the Morning Post de Londres."

The young mechanic (?) and I bowed. There followed some English dance music.

The mechanic approached me gravely: "Would you be good enough to make a special request?"

"If you would play a polka Paraguayo and some native music of Paraguay I should be honoured," I answered.

The young man then spoke over what my brother would call the "land line." Paraguayan music followed, prologued and epilogued by more flattering references to the *Morning Post* and myself.

Later, in the studios of the company, I had the devil's own job to avoid broadcasting. Apart from my dread of the microphone it would have been indiscreet in view of my determination to visit Bolivia. If no one else was listening it was certain that La Paz would be.

"Señor Thompson," said the young director, "we appreciate that you prefer not to comment on the war, but we feel that you should say a few words to correct the unfortunate impression created by English writers and by the League of Nations."

The only answer to this that I could think of was: "Young man, come, come!" but I didn't say it. I was firm. Dabble in free-lance diplomacy I jolly well would not. I think I convinced the young man of the niceties of the case, and regained his good will by promising to ask H.M.V. to send out a collection of records. They were trying hard to arrange an all English hour, but were hard put to it for local talent. They were sure a programme of English records would be appreciated and would lead to sales. So am I. H.M.V., please note, and feel generous. They play gramophones in Paraguay, and a little bread cast on the waters would not do any harm.

On this we escaped, and my tongue ceased to cleave to the roof of my mouth with fright.

With Don Federico we inspected the prisoners at work on the roads. A broad highway into Asuncion was growing, and already it was possible to reach the shores of Lake Ypacarai and go round to San Bernardino by car, without too much discomfort. "If the war goes on long enough Paraguay might have some decent roads," I said drily.

The prisoners' blank, fat-chopped faces seemed happy enough and most of them looked as though they were glad to have escaped from the hell of the Chaco with their lives. Not one of them had even a vague idea as to what it was all about, and at times they must have pined for their distant mountains that lay a thousand miles away over the jungle.

III. HUSTLE

At the end of a week I was beginning to get restive. I had no definite plans in my head; lack of money made that impossible. We had to go where we could, and do our best to steer.

If my credit arrived on the day it was due it was still five days away, and before then I should have to do something about Señora Cohen.

Actually Don Federico brought this up with a warning: "Be careful you're not charged Argentine pesos," he had advised, and I realized that was just what would happen.

Don Federico gave me an invitation on behalf of his firm of estancieros to be their guests on their properties in the Gran Chaco. I wanted to accept that. Also I had to see San Bernardino and the country round, or incur the ire of Mr. Cooper. Don Federico agreed. Every week-end he went out to San Bernardino, and he insisted we must go too.

And there was the proposed visit to Villa Hayes. That had to be done.

Most important of all was the time factor. It had seemed to me in Buenos Aires that the only chance of getting around was to hustle, and skim through every country, making train and boat connections to the minute. Quite impossible, of course. I had reckoned Paraguay as the least important part of my journey, but now I began to change that view: it was uncertain whether we should ever reach Bolivia, and it was certain that when once we left Paraguay we should not be able to return. I liked Paraguay and wanted to see more of it.

Inevitably I came to no decision, but I had the intention to stay in Paraguay if possible. The essential to this course was hustle, another word for "impossible" in Paraguay. It means finishing up in a madhouse. I fretted over these things for about an hour and then rushed off to Avenida Espana to find Captain Tottenham Smith, His Majesty's Consul. I had scarcely had more than a word with him, but we arranged for a talk before I left the country. I told him I had decided to stay a good deal longer, but meanwhile I wanted to make things move. We could not just hang around in Asuncion. (Not because it wasn't interesting or that there were not stacks of information to be picked up, but for financial reasons.)

"Ah," he said. "Señor Quevedo's the man. Know him?"

I did not. A minute later I was rushing off in search of Quevedo with an introduction on a visiting-card.

I wished I had found him sooner. Apart from any other consideration he was a charming companion. He is a soft-eyed, soft-voiced little Paraguayan of an old Concepcion family, once very wealthy. He is typical of the finest class in his country. His English is perfect and his quiet hustling methods are admirable. He had been up at Cambridge with Tottenham Smith, I think.

"To-morrow" (not the blistering, never-come mañana, but really to-morrow) he said, "the launch will be ready at the custom-house steps."

I went home and tried to relax. All through that week I had interviewed and interviewed again; straddled Asuncion by taxi and tram; asked questions and listened, and during every siesta I had worked, studying the history of the country and other things.

As soon as I had my breath I telephoned to Mr. Cooper that we should be ready to leave for San Bernardino after to-morrow. I also advised Señora Cohen and asked her to guard our luggage. "We were just going to have a look at San Bernardino. We'd be back." I hoped that would prove untrue as far as another stay in Asuncion was concerned.

In the evening I wandered out listening to gossip. There was the usual news of a tremendous victory, but I don't think anyone believed these repeated victories. Finally I drifted into a barber's shop as being the best place for gossip.

A flock of urchins assailed me, determined to polish my already gleaming shoes; and just as I was fending them off a young man in uniform strode into the shop, took a seat in the one other chair, and my flock of children left me.

I gathered the young man was a hero, and I studied him. He was a slim youth, his face still smooth-cheeked and downy, his black hair thick, growing strongly from a low, broad forehead. Yet there was a hard drawn look in his face, as though his jaws had been tight set together for long periods. Unlike most

youngsters—he could not have been more than eighteen—he was sure of himself, unabashed, unflattered even by the hero-worshipping youngsters. He was simply natural—except that it was unnatural for a youngster to be like that.

I decided to outstay him, and astonished my barber by agreeing to almost all his suggestions as to singeing, dry shampooing. Meanwhile the young soldier had his hair cut, and said, with a disinclination to talk: Yes—he was returning to his regiment in the Santa Cruz sector—Yes, he thought victory would come soon—No, he had not been greatly excited—or afraid? No . . . Normal? N-no. Normal sounded a strange word. It seemed to me that he did not know what it meant. Probably it was a long time since he had felt normal. Perhaps he never would again.

“ . . . Pobre Bolivianos,” he said.

It was apparent that the Bolivian Indios excited pity; unknowing, unwilling gun-fodder.

At last the barber's thirst for news did seem to upset the young man, and he hurried out as soon as his hair was cut. Immediately there was excitement. Didn't I know who that was? That was Mayor —, one of the greatest of all Paraguayan heroes! He has just received the highest award for bravery. He commands a regiment now. . . .

I was utterly depressed, and sorry. A young man, fine and strong, brave and energetic, a son of which his country might be proud. Paraguay thirsting for such young men to build her. . . . And he was commanding a regiment, learning about death before he knew about life, having his nervous system warped and his mind twisted. Presently he would be a corpse, or maimed, hobbling around his country, a passenger. Maybe in the end—for countries soon forget—a beggar. That old veteran . . . suppose he really did win that medal. . . .

It might not be that young man, but it was and would be thousands like him. They would never till the soil their blood had manured.

I went back to the hotel, and agreed to go with the

Cohen ménage to the open-air cinema, and listen to the trams.

The open-air cinema is a happy affair, and I found it more pleasant to sit under the stars than under the cobwebs. It was permissible to smoke, and the images working through their laborious pantomime on the screen scarcely intruded into the conversation of the audience. From time to time the overhead tram wires just beyond the screen crackled an accompaniment, and there were odd moments when it was apparent that the film was a "talkie" in Spanish—we distinctly heard the words the mouths mouthed, but that was only in sudden lulls in the barrage of trams and traffic.

The audience enjoyed the picture hugely. In its slowness of action it was comparable with an English film (pre-Private Life of Henry VIII). Everyone knew about five hundred feet in advance exactly what was going to happen. It made no demands on the mental capacity of even a Lengua Indian and it had doubtless been made under the misapprehension that such people formed Paraguayan audiences. In much the same way English companies until recently imagined England to be peopled entirely by village idiots.

We found it pleasant to chat and smoke under the stars, and occasionally to cast a glance towards the screen to see whether the picture had reached the stage promised half an hour before. It seemed to me, unable to keep thoughts of this sort out of my head, that any company making decent films in Spanish might also make some money in South America.

We went back to the hotel early, but I was not in a mood to sleep. It was no use trying to work things out. If only young Quevedo kept his word about that launch—mañana—we should be able to get away the next day. I thought perhaps we might go straight on out of the country from San Bernardino . . . there was so far to go, and so little to do it on. It was not much good trying to work things out until they happened. A singularly uncomfortable philosophy.

IV. VILLA HAYES HOSPITAL MILITAR, NUMERO 16

Quevedo kept his word. At half past-ten the best government launch lay at the custom house steps, and two dark-skinned little sailors of the Paraguayan "Navy" saluted smartly and helped us aboard. A smiling Engineer-Captain-in-one made us comfortable under the canopy aft, and introduced us to the small saloon in the body of the boat. A moment later the engine chugged, and we curved out of the lagoon, and into the main stream very pleased with ourselves.

It was the first time we had been "near" to this river; near enough to dabble our fingers in the cool water as we would have done in the Thames. But the Paraguay is not the river for such pleasantries. We chugged close to the low bank of the Paraguayan side and watched occasional alligators swimming effortlessly. They seemed much more like dangerous reptiles from the nearness of the thirty-foot launch than they had done from the top deck of the three-decker Mihanovich steamer.

Butterflies, yellow, red and blue, rioted over the swirling water, and at times we rocked fiercely as we cut through small whirlpools that spun over the whole river as though stirred by giant invisible spoons.

It was good to relax and loll back on the cushions and to let my mind wander back to the old "Kayeson" and the Skipper, by now loading grain at Rosario, a thousand miles astern, far away, blurred already in the past.

It is about three hours' run up river to the Chaco settlement bearing the name of the United States President Rutherford Hayes in memory of his ruling on the Chaco dispute between Argentine and Paraguay in 1878.*

A few kilometres up from Asuncion on the Paraguay side a thick foetid stench of blood and flesh advertised Liebig's meat works at Zepallos cué. This stench also served to establish friendship between us and the crew. The engineer looked aft

* This ruling awarded a large portion of the Chaco to Paraguay, and was accepted by Argentine and all South American countries.

from his engine; the sailors grinned; we all made wry faces and laughed. After that we talked through the remaining hours. The passengers on this launch were rather select as a rule—Presidents, Ministers and others—and the crew seldom had a chance to unbend. We offered cigarettes and learned the dangers and joys of the river. There were huge salmon-like dorado, they told us, in one particular spot where the great stress of the water showed the presence of rocks beneath.

“Great fish! Ingléses delight to catch—ten—twenty kilos!”

And that’s not a fishing story. In the Alto Parana dorado have been caught up to sixty kilos. They are smaller in the Paraguay.

We skirted the outer rim of a large whirlpool, our boat shuddering queerly. That whirlpool, we learned, was the only one we need bother about and we would have to give it a wide berth on our way home in the dark.

So, pleasantly, we arrived at Villa Hayes, with the sun at its height, and set foot for the first time on the blistering earth of the Chaco. Villa Hayes was then serving as Military Hospital Number 16, for the sick and wounded of both sides and as a prisoners’ camp. It presented the usual front of low, blank-looking, drab pink buildings, to the river, and a few small trees with narrow pools of shadow around their thin trunks. In all these villages there is a silent heaviness; a desolation.

Our arrival created a certain amount of stir; a small crowd of urchins appeared and eyed us doubtfully; a man in white overalls came from the building opposite and seemed uncertain whether to stand firm or to come forward over the expanse of thick dust to meet us. Faces at the grilled windows stared out hopefully, glad of the smallest distraction. I greeted the white-overalled man and showed him my credentials, which he read with relief. He would arrange for us to interview the major in command. Would we mind waiting?

He seemed embarrassed, feeling he ought to do something about us; ask us indoors, or to sit down. But indoors was

clearly a rough hospital, and without the major's command he could do nothing. As to sitting down, the earth itself was the only seat.

I reassured him: "Don't bother about us. We'll wander around up and down in front here."

The young hospital attendant was intensely relieved. We began a slow tramp, back and forth, under a barrage of eyes. Presently an ancient Ford spluttered into the wide dusty clearing, and stopped with a jerk. We clambered in, and then bumped over a kilometre of dusty track to a small white house on a slight rise in the ground, and there was the Major, a large rough, boisterous man, and behind him his very petite dark-haired wife. There was Frenchness about both of them; probably they had French blood with Spanish. They were more like Europeans than any other Paraguayans we had met. The major had travelled widely and spoke eight or nine languages. No English.

We presented ourselves formally: Major de Fiendra, at your service. Señora Mercedes de Fiendra. The moment that was over we had a drink of *caña*, and the awkwardness that had at first threatened our visit disappeared.

Pat and the Señora, though scarcely able to exchange a word owing to language difficulties, seemed happy together. The major fired off jokes and short staccato laughter. They had few visitors. They might have been a thousand miles from Asuncion and life, for all they saw of it. On the other hand, death was reasonably close. We were a change for them, and they for us.

We could have lounged on the sun porch of the major's small white house, looking down on the pink straggling village, and sipping our *caña*, until the sun went down. But there was work to do. A soldier brought horses for the Major and me, and the ladies bundled into the Ford. We would meet at the hospital.

We talked as we rode, not of the war but of Europe and the German threat. The major was fond of Germany. He was fond, it seemed, of everything and everybody, even Bolivianos.

But he was the kind of man whose laughter would change to a snarl very swiftly, and whose hardness would be implacable. His grey eyes were like steel.

As we rode over the dusty streets he had a greeting for everyone, women and children. Indian families sat about under grass-roofed shelters that served them as day rooms annexed to their adobe dwellings. Just beyond the village was an uneven, sloping, cleared space with rough goal posts.

"Foo-tbahl!" exclaimed the major joyously, and we made some jokes about that. We made jokes all the time in a mixture of French, Spanish and German, and found them very satisfying. Somehow we had both caught an hilarious mood, and then for me this suddenly faded.

We had come to a point where the ground fell away in a gently sloping plain to a distant belt of trees. There was an unexpected richness in the grassland and the trees. For a moment it seemed I might have been looking at English downland. There was no feeling of wildness, of endlessness.

"Beautiful* country!" said the major.

We sat erect on our horses, looking silently over this huge territory that lay flat and stoneless to the Andes, 100,000 square miles of jungle, wet with heat, the Chaco.

"Yes," I said. "It looks beautiful."

And the major's great laugh boomed at the surprise in my voice. He knew, and I knew, that the prospect from the slight hill was false, that the "might be" England would vanish after a short gallop over the rough dried grass.

We turned away and back through the village at a canter. At a clump of great fat-bellied trees I drew rein.

"There!" cried the major, as if he were responsible for the huge swollen bellies of the strange trees. "What do you think of those! *Palo Boracho!*"

For some reason I do not know the trunks of these trees swell out like aldermanic stomachs, and they have a "brewer" look, a fat tub, and drunken look. Their name suits them.

* Lindo—is hard to translate.

"How do you say *Palo Boracho* in English?" asked the major already beginning to laugh.

"Drun-ken stick," I said slowly, "or drunken tree."

"Drun-ken steeck—drun-ken tree," mimicked the major, and roared with laughter.

"A funny language," he said, shaking his head, "a funny language." And after that I had to tell him the name in English of everything that took his roving steel-grey eyes.

His humour would change momentarily from a boisterous joke to quiet softness, almost wonder, as he reached up to pluck a delicate mango blossom—"for your señora." Just as swiftly he became the soldier, acknowledging the salutes of sentries with a curt movement of his gloved hand. We were again in the region of the hospital and prisoners' quarters.

"You've been hours," said Pat.

It had been a strain for her to maintain an intelligent expression, not understanding more than an odd word or two of the conversation Mercedes de Fiendra had carried on with a young surgeon, but called upon to smile frequently. There was not a vestige of breeze; only heat, solid heat.

We followed the major and chief surgeon into the hospital. The building, as usual, was built round a large central courtyard. This courtyard was large enough to be called a barrack square. It was deserted.

The major gave the lead to the surgeon. The stench of ether came in heavy puffs from open windows; foetid, nauseating in the heat. It could not disperse. It simply hung there. The plaster walls seemed ready to crumble in the heat. Sweat stood on the major's fleshy face and beaded his upper lip. His grey eyes flicked at me.

"Hot, eh?" He sniffed—"Ether—ha—"—and in that "ha—" I could almost feel limbs being chopped off.

The surgeon opened a door that had paper gummed over its glass panels and ushered me into a small room. There was more paper gummed over the outer window. The air could be seen; a yellow *hum*. The ether became almost overpower-

ing so that it was an effort to keep one's senses. There was a rough plain wooden table; a sink; forceps, scalpels and saws—the dull plated tools of amputation and internal delvings. There was no blood to be seen but blood seemed to be in the room. There was a mutilation of bodies in the very atmosphere.

The surgeon's voice was explaining, apologetic.

"It is the best we can do here: operations, amputations, arms, legs" his voice gathered pride, even defiance—"day after day; every day. We do our best."

Bodies went on that table. It was still warm from the bodies. They went on to it with smashed limbs and came off without limbs. Often they came off dead and went under the hot soil. Day after day, all through the Chaco, in this ghostly, foetid, yellow light, in field tents and wooden shelters in the wet heat-soaked shade of trees, the scalpels were cutting, the probes probing, the saws sawing. I felt as though I were in a well of pain.

"Scarcely any gangrene," said the major in his loud voice. "Very little gangrene, eh, doctor?"

"Very little."

We passed on. Long rooms, dim and full of sickness, legs in ponderous cradles, brown faces with a curious greyness of suffering, dark heads on hard white pillows; beardless faces. Always the stench of surgery, iodine, ether, raw wounds.

There were no words to say in this place. We passed on in silence. There were no thoughts in my head; simply a kind of hopeless feeling; impotent, sullen fury; a struggling against powerlessness.

Some of the rooms were brighter. Young men in simple white smock-like garments sat up in or on their beds, their naked feet swinging. They would soon be ready to fight again.

I said to the major: "May I ask their ages?"

"Surely!" His grey eyes ranged the long room and its rows of cots.

"*Miguel—cuantos años tiene?* José? Juan?"

"*Diez y seis—sixteen—*" "Seventeen—" "Seventeen!"

We asked a dozen at random. The oldest was twenty; the veteran of these veterans, all with wounds; all with devil knows what internal disorders, the results of bad water, fever, poisoning. The rising generation of Paraguay, living as their grandfathers had lived and died, but now—victorious!

A squad of Bolivians marched with slurring steps in the heat of the yard and formed a double row in the shade against a wall. We passed slowly along the lines; their eyes stared dully from heavy fat-cheeked faces, dusky brown, almost chocolate.

"Cholos, mostly," said the major. "Poor devils."

But some were different. One had red hair and nearly white skin.

"You," said the major; "where do you come from, *Rubio*?"

"Santa Cruz—"

"We get a lot from Santa Cruz now," said the major. "They're a different breed from the *Alti-Plano Indios*." His laugh grated. "Irish father, that *Rubio*. Those Irish. You'll find their work here, there, all over—" The prisoners were marched away.

"A good little hospital," said the major. "Efficient as may be. Surgeon works hard."

A young officer was dragging an alligator towards the shade: "Shot him with revolver," he announced.

The major put his large, hairy hand on the evil-looking muzzle of the reptile. The teeth were murderous.

"Are they dangerous?" I asked, thinking of Señora Cohen.

The major made a champing movement with his jaws; "Dangerous! Try one and see!"

A number of young officers were presented. All were dark faced, intense, young men, scrupulously polite. We walked round a few buildings, a straggling group. An officer came

from the prisoners' barracks with a long brush, made of grass fibre by the prisoners. It resembled a giant's shaving brush and the handle was large enough to hold a dozen signatures. "Recuerdo del hospital militar, numero diez y seis," said the major when the handle had all our autographs.

Three of the young officers and Mercedes de Fiendra climbed into our launch to escort us across the river to inspect the meat works and the six hundred prisoners at *Piquete-cué*.

Among a small group of white-overalled, sober-faced medicos and a few urchins, the bulky, boisterous figure of the major stood out like a rock.

"Adios! Adios!"

Major Fiendra's full-throated, chuckling laugh came to us over the water.

V. PIQUETE-CUÉ: THE EXILE

We circled the Peñon rock slowly. It is like a small Gibraltar, unfortified, rearing twenty or thirty feet out of the yellow river, a natural boundary stone marking a sudden change in the world. On one side the grim stoneless Chaco, on the other the high ridges of wooded hills and the riot of vegetation of fertile Paraguay. In all the world there are no two lands so different as those separated by the yellow swirling flood of the Styx-like river Paraguay.

The Peñon has been equipped as a meteorological station and houses a keeper to tend the light that marks it by night.

As we crossed the river and approached the short wooden jetty of Piquete-cué we saw a man bounding down the green hillside from a white wooden bungalow half hidden in trees and creepers. Even from the distance of half a mile the excitement of the man was plain. We watched him keenly as he ran. Soon he was hidden by the low wooden sheds of the prisoners near the foot of the green hill; here and there we caught a flash of his long-limbed figure and an arm waved at us. It seemed he had set himself to race us to the jetty; to

be there to meet us; and as we came slowly in he ran easily along the half derelict jetty, unmindful of its missing planks, as though he knew each safe foothold with his eyes shut.

He was a tall, big-boned man, seeming under forty, and in the prime of life. An old felt hat that had become a round billycock of a dirty green colour crowned a rumpled mass of fair curly hair, and his deep-set blue eyes were dancing in absolute joy. His white shirt was open at the neck; sleeves rolled up showing strong brown arms, and his old drill trousers, once white, were without crease or shape. He was speechless with an excitement he could scarcely control. It would not have surprised us if he had begun a wild dance. In every way his behaviour was that of a man marooned, whose first sight of a sail had set him running, and now he was without words—so many times had he rehearsed the words he would say.

Our escort greeted him in Spanish and he found his tongue. He was trembling as he helped us ashore over the ramshackle jetty.

"English!" he said. "English! It's great to see you. You're from England; straight from England—the old country——" The words tumbled out of him, half fearfully, craving confirmation. We told him it was only two months since we were in London.

He pushed his battered hat back from his sweating forehead, and stood looking at us as though we might have brought some of England with us; as though in us he could feel and see England.

"Two months," he repeated slowly, and suddenly his enthusiasm burst again. "I heard you were coming—watched out for you—hoping all day. Come, let's look round. Fine little works. Proud of it." The words were slow, timorous, but accurate.

He was like an overgrown schoolboy, spontaneous; his feelings flowing freely out of him and his anxiety taking him ahead of us and bringing him back again.

"How long since you were in England?" I asked.

He stopped and stared at me.

"I've never seen England," he said—"not really. I'm English. Father died here."

At the water's edge heavy-bodied Bolivian Indians squatted naked, on their fat haunches, and rinsed their loin clothes and fragments of cotton clothing. Their bodies gleamed chocolate bronze in the sun and their timid eyes turned slowly to watch us without much interest. There was no guard in sight. The river was guard enough. There was no escape.

The tall Paraguayan-Englishman, his tongue loosened, talked quickly. His English was perfect but his tongue felt for the words, unaccustomed. Occasionally he used odd disused words. From the moment we had set foot on his domain he seemed to be scheming to keep us there till the last moment. If our interest in any part of his works seemed to wane his face clouded and he bounded off to something he imagined would hold us.

"This is all Paraguayan. We only kill three hundred beasts a day, but it's a perfect little plant."

We enthused with him about cattle races, killing-floors, freezing-chambers, furnaces and various processes.

"Not much money to spare, but all English machinery. I insist. Everything English."

His large hands caressed the bulging ends of two large new boilers in process of fitting. "Just arrived from England—grand, aren't they? Lovely things——"

We knew that alone he would examine these boilers, slowly, lovingly, imagining the works from which they had come; the hammers of the workmen; the dull English industrial town, and perhaps the country lanes which they may have travelled on a six-wheeled truck to the docks. He took great pride in the works, in every small process, and we caught his eagerness.

"Now," he said, "we must see the prisoners. Six hundred of them. Useful labour. No trouble."

We began to climb the hill down which we had seen him running. The sun was casting long shadows of the trees, and

the light was soft and golden. The lower part of the hill held a long low shelter, a grass roof supported on short poles. It was about one hundred feet long by thirty wide, and under its meagre protection the six hundred prisoners slept and ate and were sick, when they were not working. A solitary sentry stood at a distance of thirty paces.

"We're not allowed to walk between the sentry and the prisoners," said our host. "But it doesn't matter." In his voice there was pity for these slow-witted mountain Indians, whose only offence was that their masters had sent them down from their mountains into the hell of the Chaco, to kill or be killed, to capture or be captured. They could not know why. They could not have known where they were, or why they were. Dully they felt gratitude that they were no longer in the Chaco, in a strange cruel country that killed them without help from the Paraguayans. At least they could be reminded of their mountains here, and the earth, red though it was, had a rise in it. Life had never been an easy thing, anyhow.

"We have no place for the sick," said the tall Englishman. "We can't separate them. Some of them have fever. They die there. We can't do much for them."

It was just he had a thing to look at, powerless. It was war.

In a moment his enthusiasm came back, animating him, as we turned away to admire the long strips of drying meat hanging in even rows from wooden frames.

"Good jerked beef—fine to chew. Our men are glad of it." His face glowed with pride. "Our soldiers. Fighting bravely out there——" he stared across the river. "I have two sons fighting. I am proud of them."

His pride was intense and unashamed. We were surprised he had two sons old enough to fight. There was no age in him, and we had thought of him as a lonely bachelor up on his hill, dreaming of England.

Suddenly he said: "This is the best time—when the sun is sinking—it dries out slowly." He was holding a long strip of the jerked beef as a woman might hold a yard of silk material.

He was living in his imagination. Jerked beef to him was not just a strip of meat drying in the evening sun but a shred of potential life; a strip of stuff that would moisten a soldier's mouth with its juice and give him new energy for killing. And there was no outlet for his thoughts as they grew inside him. He remembered all those things most men would need to forget before they settled to live their lives at Piquete-cué. And, remembering them, he lived. His body could be imprisoned but his mind could not. It had the whole world of his imagining to roam in; a world that had no boundaries of truth; no drabness of reality. He lived in English lanes that are not in England. He saw honeysuckle and wistaria draped over cottage doors, and red cows giving milk to rosy, buxom milkmaids. It was a beautiful world he lived in, and we would renew it for him as best we could, freshen it by the reality of our presence with him at Piquete-cué and by our nearness to England.

After we had gone he would return to his new boilers, his hard fingers touching the raised lettering of the names hammered into them . . . imagining.

All this time Señora De Fiendra and the three young officers followed a few paces behind us, glad of this short release from their military world and content to let our host revel in his native tongue and his visitors. As we came into the shadow of the white wooden bungalow on the hill top, and walked amongst the lemon, the orange trees and the mangoes to the wide front verandah, we joined up as one party, apologetic, happy.

In front of the house, facing the river, a large square trellis framework, canopied with a tangle of flowering vines, was furnished with a rough table, a few chairs, and a home-made rocking-chair that Pat found perilous. The still air was heavy with the scent of jasmine, mango and campanilla, a small red bell-like blossom. A dark dumpy little Paraguayan and a pretty, fair-haired girl of about seventeen stood shyly on the verandah.

Our host called the fair-haired girl and put his arm round her waist. She was very shy of us.

"My youngest girl," he said. "Fine girl, isn't she?"

We exchanged greetings in Spanish and tried hard not to add to her blushes. "She understands English but doesn't speak it. She must learn," said her father, and for the first time his voice sounded tired.

The girl took advantage of the lull to run into the house. The dumpy little Paraguayan servant brought glasses and a large bottle of caña.

Talk flowed easily amongst the young officers and Mercedes de Fiendra but our host was silent, his blue eyes brooding, almost gloomy. We, too, had little to say. The sun was falling swiftly on a level with our eyes, and growing as it fell, a huge flaming ball, tinged with red.

Humming birds hovered, poised on invisible beating wings, their thin beaks seeking the red bell-like blooms of the campanillas, their bodies flashing colour from the dying sun, as though their feathers were filled with chips of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires; living jewels sipping from flower cups.

Tendrils of vine fell around us and the sweep of the hill fell to the broad yellow curve of the river, now shafted with the sun's fire so that it seemed to twist in tawny, straining strands. The rock of the peñon, too, had lost its grimness in this moment of evening, and northward the river twisted and turned amongst wooded hills, green in the dusk, and the sun became a red ball of fire swallowed swiftly into a purple horizon of jungle.

It seemed to us the most beautiful piece of the world we had ever seen. We were content sitting there, unmindful of our launch awaiting us at the derelict landing-stage.

Suddenly the words of the Paraguayan officers stirred our host. He got to his feet, his face strong and lean, his body renewed in vitality. With his right arm he pointed away over the dark formless mass of the Chaco.

"I have two sons out there fighting——" His voice was vibrant, defiant. "I am proud to be an Englishman; but, by God, I'm proud to be a Paraguayan."

There was no consciousness of effect. He was justifying himself; making the best of life as it was to him. His blue eyes came down to me, almost fanatical. "Paraguay—what do you think of Paraguay? You know what she has done. What do you think of her? Such bravery! Have you ever known such bravery?"

There was no sense of embarrassment in the Paraguayans as there was in me. Their pride in their country was boundless. But almost at once our host was the delighted, boisterous schoolboy again, striving to entertain us. His face, when I suggested that we should go, instantly grew long.

"Oh no; it is dark already. It makes no difference how long you stay now. There is only one danger spot and the men know it well. It will be pitch dark when you get there." There was pleading in his voice. "I want to show you my things."

We followed him into the barely-furnished square central room of his bungalow, and his wife, a homely, quiet Paraguayan woman, brought us small cakes she had made and goats' milk cheese and tea. Her husband was delighted: "Tea. What a thought! All the English love tea. I love tea."

His large strong hands were busying themselves with old books and manuscripts, yellowing with age. He simply wanted us to see these manuscripts, not to open them.

"My father's work. He was a great naturalist, my father," he said proudly. "All his life he spent in Paraguay."

It was no longer strange to us that the children of this naturalist had been born and lived out here. No naturalist can escape Paraguay. It is more than a bug-hunters' heaven, more than paradise, more than the happiest hunting ground can be to a Red Indian.

"There's a museum—Kensington—you'll see his work there."

The hours went by. We could not leave him. Years of thoughts that had collected inside him without an outlet now tumbled out of him, breathlessly, exuberantly, boyishly. He insisted we should accept specimens from his collection of old Paraguayan notes and coins. He had the old chunks of silver money from which it had been the custom to hack small pieces for payment until the original block disappeared.

Pat turned out her hand-bag and found an English sixpence and a few coppers for him. He turned them in his hands lovingly. In a moment his mind was travelling away with them to England. We told him how easily he could reach England and gave him particulars of cheap fares; and made England seem just round the corner. He played the game with us. But it was only a game. He would never see England, and perhaps he did not want to. His roots were in Paraguay; his dreams in England.

At last he stood alone, bareheaded, legs braced wide apart, on the end of the jetty watching us chug away to be lost in the darkness. Once we had said good-bye he stood in silence, a great, tall, raw-boned Englishman in the prime of his strength.

All the way back to Asuncion on the black swirling river we thought of him, perhaps still standing there, lost in a reverie of England, and then slowly rousing himself, smiling from his deep-set blue eyes, and taking his way slowly up the hill to his white bungalow, his Paraguayan wife, his family, and his memories.

CHAPTER VIII

SAN BERNARDINO

I. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WE arrived at the Hotel of the Lake after three hours in a train crammed with garrulous Paraguayans of all shapes, sizes and classes, and then nearly an hour more in a dilapidated thirty-foot launch that somehow failed to sink. In this launch, loaded to the waterline with a cargo of the most villainous-looking human beings I have ever seen and a few sacks of merchandise, we had endured the crossing of Lake Ypacarai in sticky silence. Packed between enormous mothers and their small brown offspring, who found it impossible to remain in one position for more than a second, it seemed certain that we should sink, and remain sunk. But it didn't worry us. It was too hot in that tiny cabin to think about anything.

We craved for tea. It was about half-past two in the afternoon; and we had left Asuncion at ten o'clock and had had no lunch. But there was in us no thought of food, only of tea, and a growing fear that the people in the hotel might not have heard of such a thing as tea.

That they had heard of tea, and had produced it hot and promptly, helped our first impressions. We were infinitely glad to be sitting on the wide stone-floored verandah of a hotel that lacked the peeling-plaster look we had come to think inseparable from Paraguay; that had a spaciousness in its architecture, a height and airiness; that possessed a garden with jasmine, mangos, limes, lemon and orange trees in profusion, with butterflies of colours that cannot be described because they revealed new scintillations at each flutter of



AN HOUR IN A DILAPIDATED THIRTY-FOOT LAUNCH

wings that were curved to every imaginable shape, and with humming-birds that chased them from the blossoms of the shrubs and trees.

And before our eyes, as we sipped our tea, was the deep, blue-black, creaseless water of the lake Ypacarai, an oval bowl that mirrored the hills around it. Behind us reared the thickly-wooded ridge of the Cordilleras de Amambay, and across the lake smaller hills, with long vistas of country between them, formed softly-moulded, shapely mounds which were reflected darkly in the waters.

We were happy. It was a period between escape from Asuncion and the beginning of a new phase that would not begin until we had finished tea and our minds had fallen back to normal. Also we had found the journey interesting. The train had crawled for the first fifteen minutes of its run through the highways and byways of Asuncion, introducing us to the backyards of mean streets and giving us near views of Paraguayan parlours. It had also, at the first station and the dozen subsequent stations, made clear to us the cost of living. The whole tangle of humanity in each of the train's long wicker-seated coaches—the second class made do with wood—draped themselves from the open windows at every stop and searched the baskets, borne on the heads of innumerable market women, for food. These baskets offered their wares just about window high. Oranges, we found, were without price in terms of our money. A penny would buy fifty. We wanted two. But in Paraguay nobody wants two oranges—one simply sucks a dozen or so. To buy less than a score of bananas is likewise impossible. Pineapples, fortunately, were more costly, and seemed less like stealing. We paid the equivalent of a penny for a good one, and knew by the expressions of our fellow passengers that we had paid too much. *Chipa*, a loaflike concoction made of milk, eggs, cheese, honey and flour, was also without measurable price and had many buyers.

All these things had temporarily lulled the realization of

being utterly broke that had lain on me rather heavily on leaving our hotel in Asuncion. Not that I had paid the hotel. It was the fact that I had not, and suspected that I could not, that caused my depression. I wanted to get away to San Bernardino, untroubled, to think out what we should do next.

And, by heaven, it was God's own choice of thinking-places. Sitting under the wide cool verandah, its high curved vine-covered arches framing the lake and the blue green hills, sipping tea, and savouring the feeling of pleasurable tiredness that was stealing over me, I knew the peace that preludes sound thinking.

"Old girl," I said. "Here we shall stop, and go on stopping until our credit comes. Then we shall take the International to Encarnacion. I have spoken."

"See how you feel to-morrow," said Pat, knowing my irrevocable decisions were always liable to sudden change. "And what about our luggage?"

"Um—m," I said. "Luggage. I'll get that. This place is like a dream."

"Maybe it has a dream price," said Pat. "Better find out before you decide anything."

But we could not find out at once. The fair young German wife of the host came rather shyly to greet us, explaining that her husband would not be home for some hours. Her Spanish was the simple language of a foreigner not yet perfect, and Pat found it possible to keep abreast of the conversation. We explained that we were friends of Don Federico, and that proved a sufficient passport to the hotel of the lake and its Señora.

"Don Federico comes this week?" she asked.

"I believe so——"

"We look forward to his visits—especially Horst-Tito."

Horst-Tito was her small four-year-old son, who emerged shyly from the dining-room and eyed us doubtfully from behind his mother. His head was a mass of tight fair curls, and he had the same pale, long, wistful face as his mother, with deep wide grey eyes.



A MOSAIC-TILED COURTYARD FRONTED THE HOUSE, WHICH WE SAW WAS AN
IMPOSING STRUCTURE

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Pat was clearly hoping that the tariff would prove reasonable, though whether it did or not we were clearly going to stay until our credit came.

"Horst-Tito and Don Federico are great friends," said the Señora somewhat wistfully, and I think she saw a much needed female companion in Pat, just as Pat did in her.

"Don Federico comes every Saturday," piped the child in Spanish. "He plays with me."

The Señora led us round the verandah that embraced two sides of the house. We climbed a short flight of stone steps, and found ourselves on a similar wide verandah, with each high rounded arch giving a new glimpse of the blue lake, and its sheltering hills. Onto this verandah, as with the one beneath, the double doors of the bedrooms opened. We selected a room, and felt like kings in a castle; alone in the guest-house we should enjoy perfect freedom, leaving our doors open to the night and awakening to see the sun flood over the hills.

As soon as the Señora had left us, I said:

"Here we stay. I'll go straight back to Asuncion, square the hotel bill and fetch the luggage. Then we can go on from here."

"But you don't know how much the bill will be——"

"It'll be eighty dollars Argentine," I said firmly. "I've ninety left, and I'll keep ten for odds and ends."

Pat smiled, knowing that I never argued about the price of anything and did not know how to. "Bet you'll funk it," she said. This was so likely to be true that I did not deny it.

We had cold showers, and then wandered out of the hotel. A large mosaic-tiled courtyard fronted the house which we now saw was an imposing structure. Tall battlemented towers in smooth white stone held the central block of the building, and from this two long wings extended.

"Old Federico said it was cheap," I murmured. "Doesn't look it!"

The front of the hotel faced the simple plaza of San Bernardino; a square of old shady trees, crossed diagonally by red

earth pathways. Around this square stood the several ambitious houses of the village, and in the farthest corner we found the bungalow of the missionary.

We had an embarrassing half hour in the small severe sitting-room of the missionary and his wife, a half-hour of long silences, attempts—entirely on our part—to find possible topics of conversation, that all petered out after their opening sentences.

Señor Airth was a small Scotch wisp of a man; the sort of man whose pale face would grow no paler, whose grey eyes would shine, whose voice would thunder, even while the sacrificial fires of savages roasted his feet. He spread the word of the Lord to the poor misguided savages and saved them from hellfire by baptism.

For thirty years the little missionary had been baptising, preaching, exhorting natives to be saved, and generally proclaiming his calling, so that it had become a habit. It was clear, too, that his life must have been filled with great interest, involving travel in acute discomfort through the jungles of Brazil, the Chaco and Paraguay, his strong wife sustaining him. But they seemed to be without—*juice*. When money ran out they prayed. He told me that with a faint, knowing smile in his thin cheeks. But they would not talk about worldly matters. Whichever way we looked in the severe parlour, brightly-painted texts exhorted us. Yet we felt depressed as we took our leave. There was no warmth in this missionary or his wife; the springs of their kindness seemed to be dried up in the fire of their God; it was a hard cheerless welcome; comfortless, like trying to find rest on a cold block of granite.

We did our best but the formula was not in our mouths. We had not been "saved," and our sin, somehow, was glaring on us. Nevertheless the missionary did not entirely forsake us. We had struggled not to offend him by a single word. As we left, he shook hands with a hand like a cold stick, and said : " Perhaps you will attend one of our bible

meetings at Mr. Preston's? " It was his effort to lead us into the light. He had done his duty, this little bloodless, pale, austere Scot, with his cold courage.

We went then in search of Mr. Preston. The general manager of the railway had said, somewhat mysteriously: "Go and see Preston. He runs the launch, and has a motor-car. You'll find him easily. His large red brick house faces the jetty. There is a story——"

Beyond that he would say little: "He's English; his father was an aristocrat——" He breathed a name that is almost a household word. "Perhaps he'll show you his father's house."

We had seen the house as we had landed; a large, square red brick pile that might have been set in a couple of hundred Berkshire acres instead of on the shores of Lake Ypacarai in the heart of Paraguay.

We were anxious to meet the present owner, not only for these obvious reasons but also since he represented the sole transport of the place. The beauties, the cascades, grottoes, shrines and villages of the Cordilleras from Caacupé to Piribebuy, had been sung to us by Federico and Señor Cooper.

In the shade of an old tree by the wharf we found three urchins, lolling idly, and one of them, a fair-haired, bright faced youth, who had collected fares on the launch, I called:

"Chico—tell me where I may find Señor Preston——"

"Si, señor," piped the child in a musical voice, "he is my father."

"Your father—what is your name?"

"Juan, señor."

"And you do not speak English?"

The ten-year-old child twisted his fingers, stubbed a bare toe in the red sand, and was shy.

"I understand a little, señor," His teeth flashed in a smile—"Goo' eevnin'—Goo' mo'nin', meestair!"

He had on a brown fragment of shirt and patched knickers. His lean brown legs were scarred with sores, his bare feet

calloused, and disfigured with festerings. Yet he was a gay child; a pride in his face, and in the direct look of his blue eyes. He had not lost the breeding in him.

"Your father speaks English, Juan?"

"Oh yes, señor—but my mother is German. I speak German and Guarani."

The boy led us beyond the large square house of his noble grandfather to a shed littered with the bright newly-cut planks and shavings and the tools of a carpenter's shop.

"Father will be at home," he said. "Please wait here, señor."

He bounded off towards a small white house some two hundred yards along the shore.

"Queer," said Pat, "not living in the house."

"The kid ought to speak English," I said. "You wouldn't find a kid with a German father not speaking German."

In a few minutes Señor Preston arrived and offered a large horny hand awkwardly, with the slight embarrassment a foreigner feels for this form of greeting. He was a tall man, broad, and well-built, dressed roughly in old trousers and an open shirt. His feet were bare, and an old straw panama* shaded his clean-cut English features.

"Señor Cooper said we must see your Cordilleras, and that you are the transport here," I began.

"Oh, Mister Thompson, I'm sorry. I am what transport there is, but the tyres of my car are long since worn out and I cannot get new ones. It is the war. Few people come here now." He said all this in good English but in a voice much smaller than his body.

"This war is the devil," I said. "Seems to have hit everyone."

"Indeed it has," said Señor Preston. "I want to apologize for my old launch. Had I known of your coming I would have sent the larger boat. But that, too, is old. The government have taken my beautiful launch," he added sadly.

* They make wonderful "panama" hats in San Bernardino.

We told him that we had seen Señor Airth.

"Ah—you will be at our bible meeting?" His face lit up.
"A truly devout little gathering."

I said I was sorry it would not be possible. I had decided to leave for Asuncion, make my arrangements, and return for a few days' stay. Perhaps later on.

Señor Preston then became very helpful. A train for Asuncion would pass Patiño at five in the morning. Juan would wake me at half-past two and the launch would be ready for me at three o'clock. It would be as well to allow an hour or so the other side; Patiño was some distance.

That ended our first talk with this Englishman of noble birth, whose father had died in the forsaken mansion. Several times he had referred to the red brick pile almost in awe—"My father's house." It was clear that he did not consider himself worthy to live in it, or he dared not live in it. The story intrigued me, and had determined me to make my headquarters in the hotel of the lake.

The host, a tall, sparely-built German, some twenty years older than his fair young wife, had returned and greeted us pleasantly.

"You want to stay a few days?" he asked.

"Well, yes—we should like to—if your beautiful hotel is not too expensive."

He laughed in his throat. He was not much given to laughter, though he smiled in a pinched kind of way fairly often.

"Four hundred pesos Paraguayan a day, all in."

"That's fine!" I said, and could have embraced the man. Thirty-five shillings a week for the two of us.

We drank a bottle of Argentine red wine with a well-served eight-course dinner, followed by fruit of many kinds, half of which we had never seen before. The coffee, too, was excellent. The waiter was a young Austrian with the bearing of a crown prince and a great cheerfulness.

"We'll say good bye to England," I said, savouring the red

wine happily. "We'll send for the children. All our troubles are over. Under two pounds a week! This is the authors' and artists' heaven. Perhaps we are dead——"

"I'm not dead," said Pat. "You don't itch when you're dead. My ideas of heaven don't include mosquitos, flying beetles, tarantulas, and frogs the size of tom cats!"

A frog that was as round as a football and measured eight inches from its wide mouth to its blunt stern had chosen that moment to hop in from the verandah. It let out a huge complaining croak.

"Oh golly!" said Pat, hoarsely. "Tell it to go away." I attempted an admonitory croak without effect.

"Lindo sapito," said the young German señora, coming over to our table. "They are nice in the house, yes?"

Pat forced a smile and suppressed a groan. "What's the Spanish for charming, Tommy?"

II. MATÉ WITH A BARONET; COFFEE WITH AN AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT SALESMAN

"Señor——" the voice was clear and low, calling me from my sleep.

I awoke at once and crawled from under the mosquitero.

"Buenas, Juan."

"Buenas, señor." The boy's voice was music and I liked him to speak.

"What time is it, Juan?"

"Las dos y media, señor."

Even at this hour of the morning the stone floors were wonderfully cool to my bare feet, without chill. There was a slight breeze; the sky was filled with stars; the black line of the ridge no more than a gentle darker shading of the night. Already from the lake came vague restless sounds of men's voices and preparations of the launch, and the bamboo clumps stirred in the breeze like shivering castanets.

"This is a beautiful place, Juan."

"It is more beautiful in the hills, señor."

A thought moved him. He paused a moment and then spoke swiftly: "Señor, I have a horse, and my father, too, has a horse. Will you ride with me to-morrow in the Sierras?"

I thought: I shall be tired to-morrow; but at once the exhilaration of the night laughed at the thought.

"Are there villages?"

"Si, señor—many villages."

"Very well."

"At four I will come, señor," said Juan, delighted, but with indifference.

"At six you will come!" I said firmly.

The boy's face fell. "It is late, señor."

"Six," I repeated.

"Muy bien, señor—seis."

Pat was fast asleep under the mosquitero.

"While I am away you will look after my señora, Juan?"

"Yes, señor."

We walked quietly down the stone steps and out into the gardens, keeping to the grass so that we should walk soundless. The slightest noise had a distinct being; the croak of a frog, the rustle of leaves in the wind.

The lake was low; lower than it had ever been in memory, said Juan. The water had receded two hundred yards from the square stone harbour built by his grandfather fronting his house. The jetty had grown longer and longer; a rough wooden construction of uneven planks, widening at the end into a shelter.

Half-way along a man came to meet me, respectfully, black hat in hand, but I had no baggage. The man's voice was soft, but his face, even in the darkness, was villainous. I could see that his eyes were crossed, and his hair grew thick and black from a low creased forehead that was like a trough above his heavy eyebrows.

"Is the launch ready?"

"Si, señor."

In the launch was yet another individual who was a match for his companion in the villainy of his looks and the crossing of his eyes. My God, I thought; has Señor Preston employed these thugs to escort me out of life? But presently I had forgotten them. The lake was liquid velvet, holding the stars almost still. There was an exquisite texture in the night; a quality of balanced perfection. It was as though the night was held within the hills, so that the lake and sky and hills were a complete rounded form, that was still, yet grew with a measureless grandeur of movement that was like the growing of a plant.

Out on the water there was a soundless peace to which the ripple from the bows and the slow steady beat of the engine lent a rhythm. It seemed barely five minutes before the voices of my two villains advised me that we had reached the landing-stage of the distant shore, yet I had not closed my eyes, and it had been a full hour.

The two men walked ahead of me between the rail tracks that ran the length of the jetty. They expected to find a "jigger." A short branch line from the main line station served this wharf; a piece of the train being shunted off. Usually the "jigger" was left at the wharf's end, to which the train could not go. But now, to my escort's annoyance, it seemed to have been pushed back to the train's limits on dry land.

I expected to walk and would have been glad to do so but my guardians had received explicit instructions for my comfort and I was exhorted to board the "jigger." I sat cross-legged on the front of the small-wheeled trolley and enjoyed myself. Sitting there, cross-legged, wheeled through the night, the steel rails droning under me, I felt like some potentate or an effigy in an Eastern procession, but the only spectators were the trees with their twisted trunks, and the blob-headed palms and the tall grasses that bordered the track.

Soon we came to a halt, and the remainder of the journey

had to be done on foot. Patiño was not the station from which the train shunted, and the branch line did not lead there. A mile or two ahead I could see the yellow glimmer of lights that marked the village, and without wish for such conversation as my escort offered I dismissed them, assuring them that I should return with much baggage some twelve hours later.

By the time I reached Patiño the sky had begun its languid preparations for the dawn. Its velvet blackness had fused to an intense indigo in which the stars seemed to gain in brightness before they would be lost.

A tall lean man with stooping shoulders, and wearing a stationmaster's cap on his angular head invited me into the booking office.

"You are up early, señor. From San Bernardino?"

"Si, but I return again to-day with my luggage from Asuncion."

"Ah—you like San Bernardino! Will you take *maté* while you wait, señor?"

I thanked him, and watched as he bedded his small kettle in the glowing twigs of his fireplace. He had a cat-shaped face, ready to grin and show a line of broken yellow teeth. But he was loose-limbed and scraggy, unlike a Paraguayan.

Presently he offered me *maté*; in an old cup.

"You are English, señor?"

"You compliment my Spanish," I said amused.

"Ah, you speak well, señor, but I, too, am English. I know."

Hell! I thought. This country is filled with indiscretions.

"My father was the friend of Señor Preston's father. I was born here," the stationmaster continued. "My father died when I was a boy."

"You don't speak English?" I said unnecessarily.

"No, señor—German, a little."

But his next remark made me bury my face in my *maté* cup while I battled with laughter. There was no doubt that

he was speaking the truth. When I was safe from laughing, I said soberly: " And you like this life here, Sir William? "

His cat-like face grinned and his stooping shoulders shrugged limply: " Oh yes. What else is there? "

Later Señor Airth, the evangelist, confirmed this strange man's forbears, and told me that his father had arrived at much the same time as Preston's father, some forty years earlier, and that probably the stationmaster was legitimate—though there were numerous English offspring all over the country.

Paraguay is a good safe cupboard for skeletons and indiscretions are scarcely indiscreet there. Men are needed, and men are few.

Long before I had tired of Sir William the rumble of the train intruded into our conversation; a small trail of fire was racing over the countryside towards us, and across the lake, behind San Bernardino, the ridge of the cordilleras was already rimmed with amber.

It was after eight o'clock and the business of the day was in full swing by the time I reached Don Federico's office, thinking to gain a little moral courage from him before tackling Señora Cohen. I told Don Federico my position; authorized him to collect my credit when it came, and with his assurances that sixty dollars Argentine should be ample for Señora Cohen, I walked bravely to do battle.

But Señora Cohen was nowhere to be seen. I instructed the pallid major-domo to prepare my account and have my luggage ready, and ordered coffee to await the results of the major-domo's arithmetic. I had almost convinced myself that I might have enough money after all and that no argument would be needed.

Meanwhile, a young man emerged from a room, and presently asked if he might take coffee with me. He was an Argentine, he said, born of English parents. He seemed anxious to talk.

He was an agricultural implement salesman, and finding

himself at Corrientes, and his holidays due, he had taken the opportunity of combining a little business with pleasure and sounding the possibilities of Paraguay.

"For, Señor Thompson, this country is entirely agricultural!"

Alas for his hopes of new markets! He had touched perhaps the only remaining civilized portion of the world. He mistook a real appreciation of life for stupidity, and was overflowing once I let him get started.

"These stupid peasants!" he exploded. "They do not want money. They are without ambition. They seem content to own a few hectares and let the earth produce for them." He rattled on, unburdening himself, attributing my monosyllabic encouragements as sympathy instead of delight.

"They loll in their hammocks and swing. They suck oranges, take a bite of banana, take *maté* constantly from daughters who seem to have nothing else to do but continually replenish the gourd. They have caña, tobacco. I told them that modern implements would increase the yield of their lands, and they said: Yes, señor, but the land yields more than enough for us already. I told them they would be able to make money, and sell the surplus!"

I repressed a smile. Already I knew the picture; the peasant in his hammock, content, with all he needed, a pleasant obedient wife, children, the abundance of the soil yielding to stone age tools.

"They answered—'What for?' 'What for!'" said the salesman piteously, inserting a finger between his collar and neck. "What for! Money——"

It was beyond him.

I had no wish to be drawn into an argument, and it was clear he conceived there could not be an argument. But I ventured: "Money is only to buy things with . . . and if one has everything—enough——"

"They'll never get rich like that!" he roared, and decided me to talk a little.

"They are to be envied," I said, sadly. "Money has cursed every other nation but this. Money has no value except for what it can buy, and these Guarani peasants have all they desire—you said so yourself. What more could money give them?"

"But," he exploded in exasperation, "they could have a good time—visit the towns."

I did not laugh. "That is your pleasure, not theirs," I said, and offered him a cigarette to ease the tension.

We smoked, and he simmered with occasional virulent snorts.

"It must have been galling for you," I soothed. "I see your point (and so do they), but their point is sublime. You want to make them work, and learn rivalry and jealousy, and they don't want to work. We only work to live up to our desires. They attain their desires on a minimum."

"They don't know what life is," said my salesman angrily. "They have no theatres, cinemas, races. They don't realize what money can buy."

"They will be finding out one of these days," I assured him. "This land is Utopia. Presently it will be exploited. Already there are Germans forcing the land to yield to them. You'll sell them all your newest devices."

"You sympathize with these people, Señor Thompson. It surprises me," he rebuked. "There is no progress here——"

"And little unhappiness," I said. "These people are not ruled by gold. They'll get the fever in the end, and bang will go swinging in hammocks, and eating a score of oranges——"

At this moment, perhaps fortunately, the major-domo proffered my account on a small tray and reminded me sharply that money was a very pressing necessity in my world anyway.

Nevertheless I owed a debt of gratitude to my chance acquaintance. Perhaps, left to my thoughts awaiting my account, I should have wilted to a state of what Pat calls "moral cowardice." As it was I was feeling rather exhilarated. The salesman excused himself politely; the major-

domo adopted a discreet, expectant pose, and clasped his thin white hands; I opened the envelope and learned the worst.

I think the major-domo expected some expostulation, for he moved alongside and bent towards me. I maintained a monotonous silence, appearing to study every detail. Finally I simulated surprise.

"There seems to be a slight error of nationality in this account. I thought it very cheap. I see now you have inadvertently charged Argentine pesos—of which, of course, there are none in this country. You will be charging your guests in yen if you're not careful," I said cheerfully.

"Er—um." The major-domo cleared his throat. "It is correct, señor, \$137 pesos Argentine."

"Why, then, am I charged differently from other guests?"

"Certainly you are not, señor——"

"The Paraguayan guests pay Argentine pesos?"

"Well . . . er, you have come from Argentine, señor——"

"Perhaps you will find Señora Cohen," I said, and he retreated, reappearing in a few moments with that amiable lady.

Now that I had well embarked on this money haggles I was quite enjoying it. The first word alone had been difficult.

The señora was charming. Having assured me that the war accounted for the price of things, she accepted my comments in good spirit. I was, I explained, a journalist, and it was my job to know about things. Her rent, I told her, had not been raised. Her servants' wages also remained negligible. Food, but for imports, such as whisky (of which I had had but one small drink as her guest), was almost as cheap, if not so plentiful, as formerly. I pointed out that she had charged me in Argentine pesos for my coffees, thus making a profit of several thousand per cent.

She actually looked a bit abashed. Damn it, it was a bit thick charging 25 cents Argentine for a cup of coffee for which her usual price was 2 or 3 pesos Paraguayan.

At last she said: "How much will you pay?"

"Eighty dollars Argentine."

"Very well." She turned to the major-domo: "Make out a new account for Señor Thompson, for eighty dollars."

We then had a drink, and parted the best of friends.

Only Don Federico damped my triumph slightly: "She didn't expect as much. She's probably celebrating now."

But I felt I had saved \$57 dollars Argentine, and as it was the first time I had ever saved anything I was astounded at myself.

III. GARDEN OF EDEN

Juan, whose duties as a fare collector on his father's launch had removed him from his care of Pat, advised me strenuously of his good offices during my afternoon re-crossing of the lake. This time, my expected arrival had been honoured with the larger launch, and I sat in the stubby bow with Juan on one side of me and a dark-haired Guarani lad of similar age on the other. The boys had attached themselves to Pat as inescapably as shadows and had provided her with a book on Paraguay, an ancient document, once the property of the noble grandfather. I thanked them suitably, and renewed my pledge, somewhat unwillingly, to ride at six in the morning. The hour had slipped again in Juan's mind to four, but this time there was no mistaking my firmness. The afternoon was a blaze of heat, and I was already looking forward to a lazy evening and early bed.

I found Pat and the young German hostess firmly established in friendship and a homely atmosphere prevailing. Somehow their languages difficulties, which were considerable, had given them more fun than annoyance and my first duty was to disentangle a problem that had been bothering Pat and the Señora since breakfast. The problem was simply the statement that I should be back at the moment I was back.

Pat had also had difficulty in describing to the Señora a cer-

tain cure for mosquito bites contained in the valuable book lent her by Juan.

"This book's a hoot," said Pat in delight. "Written by some strait-laced traveller in the 'eighties. I've been trying to translate this cure for mosquito bites to the señora."

She thrust the book upon me and I read: "Kill an alligator (yacaré). Wait until the flesh is rank, then smear the rank fat over your body."

I turned the book over. "Must be a Wodehouse!" But no. It was an intensely serious and extremely ponderously-written document, quite without any intentional humour.

"Smear the body in rank alligator fat! For mosquitos!" Oh, why hadn't we thought of that.

When I had convinced the señora that the book really did advise that treatment she assured us quite seriously that alligators, though rare, might be found in the lake, but we decided that since other guests might visit the hotel during the week-end, and since Pat had a husband, and Pat herself was easily nauseated, perhaps we had better leave the cure to more hardy and less fastidious readers. We preferred oil of citronella, although prepared to believe that alligator fat in a rank state might be more efficacious.

The book contained many other hints and tips for travellers, but none quite reached sublimity.

But I have forgotten my triumph in the matter of the hotel bill. Pat was delighted, though disbelieving until I had displayed the receipt and the remaining ten dollars. It meant we were solvent up to date, and there would be no more worry for five days until the International train went to Encarnacion. By that time my credit would come. It was already due, and doubtless Don Federico would bring it at the week-end. We dismissed all cares and prepared for five days of complete enjoyment.

I find it hard to write sparingly of San Bernardino. It was the first of three short periods of our journey in which my happiness was beyond anything I had dreamed of in my life,

and because of this, every detail and event lives clearly for me and I am always living small piquant scenes over again. Nevertheless, only in completeness could I hope to invest the narrative with anything of the spirit I had from the events, and without that flavour, which is the essence, I feel that there must be a lack of appeal. Of San Bernardino, of the Chaco, of Iguazu, I could write three separate books and would delight in so doing if I had the time. But here these things must be no more than chapters.

Perhaps it was as well that the señora showed us a small water-colour of the lake before the sun went down that evening. It seemed to us a crude, ill-designed, amateurish piece of work, remarkable only for the extraordinary colours used. These colours showed an imagination far ahead of the artist's skill, colours quite impossible in reality. The lake itself was depicted in three distinct strips; yellow gold in the foreground, suddenly becoming fiery red in the centre, and finally emerald green. The hills were purple, and behind them was a crimson sky.

Pat said, when we had looked at this thing for a moment or two in silence, trying to find suitable expressions: "But why these colours? What on earth made him choose those colours?"

I joined my astonishment.

"They are the right colours," said the Señora. "He didn't choose them. The lake is exactly that at sunset."

We did not believe it. I don't think anyone, seeing that water-colour, would have believed it. I don't think anyone seeing it written down as a description of a lake and hills would believe.

It was, of course, true. A young, obviously unimaginative artist, could not have seen those colours unless they were there. They were there, astoundingly there, as the sun set that evening. As with the rich red soil also with the sky nature was over-abundant in her gifts. It was unbelievable.

The clear mound of the *cerro* on the distant shore was reflected sharp and clear almost to our feet, and then as the



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sun sank the whole surface of the lake was the colour of yellow beaten gold with a narrow strip of green pale water separating the gold from the deep purple hills. Slowly the gold turned red gold, and the green fillet had the depth and hue of a dark emerald. The hills behind became deeper purple, and behind them again the wild backcloth of the sky flared amber yellow and red.

Who ever heard of a golden lake with an emerald strip in it, purple hills, amber and red sky all at once? We saw it.

It seemed that all things in this land were over-emphasized. There was the heavy stillness, and the uneasy stirring of the wind soon after the sun had set, that heralds a storm, and presently a wild chorus swelled in a maddening crescendo of welcome or fear. Nearby, the harsh croaks of the great frogs belched a prelude to the coming rain; from the virgin forests in the hills came the screams of monkeys and the high shrill bark of apes. In the hills, we were assured, there were jaguars, pigs, snakes of all sizes, lizards, and birds innumerable, and all were adding their greetings to the thunder clouds, while the bamboo clumps rattled and clattered in a fierce concatenation with each growing shiver of the wind.

When the storm burst there was no room for thought. The din was colossal; the thunder crashing in mighty peals; jagged forks of livid blue-white flame stabbing down into the lake, splitting the vault of the sky for seconds at a time, and imprinting unforgettably on our minds stark black relief pictures of the lake and hills.

Before the sun had done more than creep over the edge of the world, Juan and I were setting out on the long climb to Altos, revelling in the freshness the rain had brought. . . . We climbed the hills over what had been a road which had been built by Lopez in his mad military operations, but which was now only a boulder-strewn track. As we climbed the track twisted and turned and we had glimpses of the lake between the trunks of giant trees and the tracery of creepers, shining like a sapphire far beneath us. If it had not been for Juan's

insistence that Altos was some leagues ahead of us, I should have stayed gaping indefinitely.

At times, snakes, almost indiscernible against the backgrounds with which they fused, twisted swiftly across our path, and the dense forest which hemmed us in was alive with whisperings and scurryings. Miniature cascades, started by the heavy storm, tumbled in diamond particles over red boulders, and lizards with spiky frills spread from their necks baked placidly in the sun or held themselves poised in tension as though petrified, while others, more timorous, sped like green flashes out of sight.

At the summit of the range the great trees of valuable timber, hard green palo santo, madera, and the tall palms and tangled vegetation, gave way before tracts of cultivated land. Bananas hung in heavy bunches sheltered by the broad blades of their leaves; fields of mandioca, alternated with cotton, tobacco, coffee, cocoa palms, pea-nuts, and the tall spears of maize, all thriving equally and in wild profusion, while oranges, limes, lemons, grapefruits, pineapples, and trees heavy with soft green figs rioted everywhere, infringing the domain of the wild. For these fruits were in too great abundance to have value. It is only recently that grapefruit have been considered saleable in the towns, being despised by the natives.

Amidst all this wealth of growing things small green parrots sped in sharp crying clouds, butterflies fluttered blue, yellow and red wings, humming-birds poised glittering in the shafts of sunlight, and here and there great beetles shone with magnificent greenish iridescence.

We rode slowly into the wide square of Altos and circled it. The single-storey houses were good and built solidly of stone. Native families squatted in the sun outside crude dwellings, but the population was mainly German. A long white building, with neatly fenced yard, and the unmistakable look of a school, bore the Nazi swastika over its porch, and the word *escuela*.

We sat in the shade of an orange grove and I smoked while Juan told me that all villages had their German schools; that all German children had to speak their native tongue; that San Bernardino and most of the surrounding country and all the cultivation we had seen, was German.

"But, Juan," I said, slightly irritated; "Why do you not learn English? Aren't you proud of being English as the other children are of being German?"

The child shrugged. "My mother is German. There are no English here. We all speak German. Besides, I am Paraguayan."

There was a conscious defiance in this fair-skinned, blue-eyed grandson of an English aristocrat, truly now a Paraguayan. As we spoke he played with a large knife, whittling a stick, and balanced the knife to throw at a tree trunk. He had the same love of a knife as the native children.

"Nevertheless, Juan," I continued quietly, "English is useful. More people speak it than any other language. . . . Unless you want to live your life here."

Juan looked surprised, and I laughed suddenly when I thought of the agricultural salesman, and that I was trying, with my darned national pride, to upset this lad and inject the virus of ambition, without which he would be a good deal happier. I was as bad as the evangelist Airth with his religion.

As we rode slowly near the village, small groups of children, brown as burnt sugar, with round intelligent faces and thick black hair, passed us in single file. Each child smiled suddenly and called in a musical voice, "*Adi -O!*" So that it was like a trill in the treble as they filed along—" *Adi -O, Adi -O, Adi -O.*"

And they wore short vests that stopped at their navels, showing fat brown little stomachs like footballs above their slender legs.

Several times, too, we passed Guarani girls bearing heavy loads easily on their dark gleaming heads, and moving with an

easy grace, a slow swing from the hips, that was the very poetry of motion.

When at last we arrived at the Hotel of the Lake, and the young Austrian waiter brought us long drinks, I said to Pat : " This place is a fairyland, a garden of Eden. I doubt very much that anyone will believe it."

The effusions of the Paraguayan writer, Felix de Azara, no longer caused me to smile but moved me to sympathy. His adjectives seemed paltry, and even his statements in regard to health seemed no longer wild. Perhaps Paraguay was, as he had said—" El pais mas sano del mundo," and was practically without lunatics.

It was paradise.

IV. OF THE THINGS THAT MAY BE LOST IN EL ULTIMO CONTINENTE

Pat, as I have already hinted, did not entirely agree with my estimate of San Bernardino. And as we strolled in the shade of the orange trees, making our way slowly towards the wharf and Señor Preston, a queer spidery-looking thing moved over the red earth towards us. We watched it, forgetting for the moment that we stood in its course. It was a large, furry, bulbous obscenity slung amidst a cluster of tall, angled, hairy legs. There was something nauseating about the creature. It was almost as if the body was some bloated, sickly idol, carried in a palanquin by tall thin slaves—its eight-inch legs. It came swiftly. A tarantula. We gave it a wide berth, yet felt compelled to watch over our shoulders its disgusting progress, not wishing to have it near us, unmarked.

It is queer how a small thing that one kick of a big boot would smash to atoms can inspire such a feeling of horror. The mere thought that I might have to kick it, or clout it to a pulp with a stick, induced a shuddering repulsion. Even to shoot it—to disintegrate the foul blob of its body—gave me

the creeps. No tiger, lion or wild pig, much more dangerous than that bag of poison, gives a man this feeling.

We found Señor Preston at the end of the wharf, swinging his bare feet just above the water, and directing a Bolivian prisoner in repairs to the propeller of the larger launch. He made to rise as we came up and became apologetic about the old and tattered singlet which covered a small portion of his body and left his powerful arms and shoulders bare.

We sat beside him on the wharf's edge and admired the naked Bolivian Indian working waist-deep in the blue-black water.

"The lake is getting lower every day," said Preston in a complaining nasal voice. "These fools of natives have not brains to think. They forget the rocks, and the propeller. The shaft is bent."

"The storm," I said. "We thought it would take the roof off. It helped?"

Preston shrugged sadly. "Not a millimetre," he said.

The lake was fed from the hills and owed its blue-black opacity to the decaying roots and vegetation that the rain washed down. The water of the lake was believed to have great health properties, and at that moment two old Indian women, fully dressed in their loose linen garments, were walking into it with faint smiles on their faces.

Once, Preston told us, there had been an outlet to the Paraguay river at the western end, but now that had closed up. The lake was an oval bowl held in the hills, a little more than five leagues from pole to pole, and one league across.

As we sat there together, content to let conversation take its course, Preston began to speak of his father. We guessed he did this infrequently, while thinking often.

"My father brought thousands of square feet of timber out of the hills," he said. "Wonderful timber! As good as oak and mahogany for furniture."

"And now?" I ventured.

Preston shrugged his broad shoulders. "Transport is impossible," he said pettishly.

But he lacked the energy of his old father and the money-making instinct. The son was content with his small carpenter's shop, his launch monopoly, his lazy easy-going life. There was a fretful defiant note in Preston's nasal, careful English. He had both a pride and anger in his birth; feeling that it had made people expect more from him; made him expect more from himself.

"Carpentry is the chief work of San Bernardino," he said. "It is mostly German now. I'm a lone Englishman——"

He might have added: "I can't fight them... why should I?"

But he had been there first; inherited the lake; the launches; the grand house....

"You'd like to see father's house?" he said suddenly.

He knew we had been waiting for him to come to this point.

"We'll go now," he said. "While there is good light."

The Bolivian seemed to have the hang of his task and accepted Preston's instructions with a grin, and a shaking head. We walked slowly down the wharf looking at the old brick two-storey house with its tall Georgian windows. Without its verandahs it might have stood on an Essex village green. The sort of house we have always longed for, and hope to have some day. With an old walled garden.

"The lake used to be right up to the wall my father built; that little harbour," said Preston, as we came to the crumbling buttresses. His tone suggested that even the lake had conspired against him.

We entered the house through a side door and came first into the large stone-floored kitchen, and from there into the dining-room. Preston opened the window shutters and the room gradually came to life in the afternoon light.

It was a long room, the high ceiling gloomy with shadows as the outer verandah kept the light low. The walls were panelled with what looked like oak, but Preston assured us it was a local wood. All the furniture and woodwork, which seemed either oak or mahogany, had been made in his father's workshop from timber out of the hills.

Heavy bronze candelabra hung from a bronze chain above the massive dining table. A great sideboard of the same mahogany-like wood filled the whole width of the room against the wall. It was hard to believe that all this furniture had been fashioned in San Bernardino and had not come straight from a Victorian mansion. At the far end of the room was a huge fireplace of stone with gothic lines, and a large brazier of wrought-iron had sat for years unused under the wide chimney.

"Father used to like a log fire," said Preston in his worrying voice. "He used to sit with his friend, Sir William, from over the lake. It was never cold enough for a fire," he finished, and left us with the picture of the two old men, sitting there, the firelight glinting on their cheek-bones.

Flanking this fireplace, and seeming to embrace it as an altar, paintings of Christ and the apostles looked down, life-sized, from the walls. The light was dim at this end of the room, but it was sufficient to reveal a strength and design in the work that was far from ordinary. We stood for a moment in silence, letting the room take hold of us, seeing the patriarchal old father at the head of his great gleaming table lit with the soft yellow light from the candle sconces, these paintings enfolding the room in their gravity and colour.

Pat said sharply: "Who painted these? They're on the walls——"

It had not occurred to us until that moment to find these pictures strange in this place; the father had, of course, brought them with him from England. But that was now impossible. We examined them more closely. They were copies, but none the less works of real talent, and it was only then that Preston's voice called us to appreciation of the room's crowning glory. At first the gloom of the upper part of the room had clothed the walls above the panelling in shadow, but now we saw that the whole length of the wall facing the windows was given to a painting of the Last Supper, after Leonardo da Vinci. The yellow shafts of the dying sun half illumined the faces and gave them life.

Pat was excited. Young Masters in oils are not as a rule to be found in such places. "Who painted these?" She insisted.

"Father found him," said Preston slowly. "A young Paraguayan. He went mad . . . religious mania——"

Pat made a small anxious noise.

"He died," said Preston. "Suicide."

We were silent for a time; walking slowly round the room. Above the massive sideboard there were portraits in oils of the father and mother, serene and handsome in their early Victorian dress, their eyes wide and imperious, yet with a restlessness that seemed to follow us around the room.

"We hold our bible meetings here," said Preston, almost defiantly, "with Señor Airth."

I was not sure whether I was glad or sorry that I had missed it. It might have made me violently angry, or not.

We walked slowly through the house. In every room the furniture remained exactly as it had been when the old man had died. It had no part in the lives of his son and his grandson, this furniture. It died with the old man, and the house, too, died with him. It was a relic, a tomb for him. The solid old Victorian furniture, great four-poster beds, and chests of drawers, all made in the old man's carpenter's shop.

With a rusty key Preston unlocked the door of his father's room. We almost expected to see the old man lying there, on his high canopied bed, his aquiline, bearded face transparent in death. There was a mustiness in the room; cobwebs and dust; though it must have been cleaned at intervals.

"Father used to lie up here most of the time—in his last years. He was eighty-five," said Preston slowly.

It seemed to us that he regretted showing us this room; that it had awakened feelings in himself that were better dead. We said nothing. Presently Preston went on: "He used to hate us to speak Spanish in the house. . . ." His voice trailed into reminiscent pauses in which the old man, his father, grew clearer to him and to us, and the life that had been in this house became real. The family downstairs, using the

kitchen for meals instead of the dining-room that frightened them; fearful of the old man who had lain, ears attuned for every sound, on this bed. Perhaps the old man's thoughts had been in England, in the noble mansion of his youth. . . .

"Father used to shout down to us—'Speaking Spanish again—Spanish! I won't have you speaking Spanish in this house. . . . You're English——' "

The old man clinging to his native country; clinging to the hope that he had founded an English family here in the heart of the Last Continent; fighting the Spanish tongue that he knew was coming more and more naturally to his children; that would be the language of his grandchildren.

"Father only spoke Spanish to his workmen. He wouldn't utter a Spanish word in this house."

The old stairs creaked under us and we came back at last to the world outside; to the lake and its mad, wild colours in the sunset, and there Juan met us, his blue eyes shining hopefully; Juan with his bare calloused feet, his fair skin, and hair, a little Paraguayan boy just able to say "Goo' mo'nin', goo' evenin'."

Preston said: "I've tried to teach the children English; but we speak Spanish all the time. Their mother's German."

We said: "It must be difficult. Not much use anyhow."

We wanted to ease him, accepting his feeble excuses, respecting the feeling in him that had kept the old house inviolable for his father's memory.

And presently the house itself would be only a memory; crumbling away, the paintings on the walls crumbling with them; Juan, a grown man, giving some garbled account of an ancestor no one would believe. Until it all was dead.

We should have liked to leave Preston then, but he seemed anxious for our company and walked over the brown scorched grass with us. He did not invite us to his house, but he began to praise Paraguay with a kind of fervour, and I felt that he had moods when he would like to burn that square brick Georgian mansion to the ground and run amok through it,

smashing all things beyond recognition with an axe. Yet again, he had a pitiful pride in it and in the tortured pleasure it gave him of tormenting old wounds in himself.

Presently he grew almost boyish. He had a naïve boyish charm about him, and an ease of manner and dignity. He spoke glowingly of the possibilities of the country and the hills, and of the money that would one day be made; of the German invasion; of the wonderful soil. From time to time he plucked leaves from trees and crushed them in his hands, smelling them, and offering others to us. "Tea made of these leaves will cure headache. . . . Tea made of these leaves will cure rheumatism——"

It seemed that the Paraguayans were a race of herbalists. There were forms of tea to cure all ills. Whatever ailment the country might cause it also provided the cure.

Preston told us these things with a personal pride, and stooped to pick a small vine from the earth.

"This will surely cure all stomach complaints," he said.

It was a delicate little vine.

"Tapé cua, it is called—in Guarani. That means 'Where once there was a road,' and it is said only to grow over old tracks."

We came again to the wharf and found the Indian sitting in the launch, his body gleaming wet and bronze. The propeller was mended.

I said: "One day you'll get that timber out and make a fortune. Or young Juan will."

His eyes ranged the darkening woods, and he said quietly:

"El Ultimo Continente—they call it. The Last Continent. A man is buried alive here—lost."

And we knew his bullock waggons would never bring the new logs down from the hills, and his carpenter's shop would never multiply and hum with circular saws. He was lost, and with him all that was left of his father's would be lost.

They would say of Juan: "See, the fair-haired rubio—some Englishman's indiscretion!"

And Juan, swinging in his hammock, sucking his *maté*, and stroking the buttocks of his Guarani wife, would smile, not knowing the meaning of the words, and caring less.

V. FEDERICO ARRIVES—A HAPPY FAMILY—I MEET MY
“ COLLEAGUE ”

The event of the week at the Hotel of the Lake was always the coming of Don Federico. Horst-Tito, if one could judge by his excited preparations and the dance he led the Bolivian prisoner whose business it was to look after him, would perhaps have felt the keenest, and most easily forgotten, disappointment had his hero failed to arrive. But he was not alone in anxiety. The Señora looked forward to the weekly visits and assured Horst-Tito and herself that Don Federico would surely come.

Pat, also, was anticipating with pleasure a discourse in her native tongue with someone other than myself; and for me there was the mercenary aspect. Saturday is quite near to Tuesday, and if we were to leave Paraguay on that day Don Federico must be the bearer of our credit.

So a shrill shout from Horst-Tito in the midst of siesta did not disturb anybody's rest, and Don Federico took *maté* with the household; Horst-Tito scrambling over his knees, the señora eagerly seeking the gossip of Asuncion, Pat grateful for a new bottle of citronella Don Federico's thoughtfulness had supplied, and I thinking rather rapidly, in view of the non-arrival of my credit,—without which not.

It required little thought. The señora was delighted.

“ Then you'll stay until your money comes ! ”

“ Yes, señora. It is really a fortunate chance.”

I did not see an alternative and, apart from some anxiety as to what might have gone wrong with my arrangements, I was not sorry to stay. An extra seven days—for there was only one train a week—seemed a pleasant enough prospect and the señora was naïvely and flatteringly delighted.

"I will teach your señora Spanish, and maybe German too," she said eagerly.

"Ten days, señora! You will have Mr. Berlitz and Mr. Hugo on your track."

We changed into swimming suits and wandered down to the lake. We felt no keenness about the impending immersion in the thick blue-black water, but it was a ritual with Don Federico, and his assurances that we should feel a new glow of health and that all our ills would be washed away would have made it ill-mannered to refuse.

But it was not so bad. A number of small brown children frisked in the black mud at the water's edge. We felt the stuff oozing round our feet with misgivings.

"Sometimes there are sting-rays," said Federico calmly. "A child lost a foot."

We lifted our feet from the ooze and had a swim, and afterwards, when we were lying out in the sun to dry, it seemed worth while. Don Federico, in spite of his partial paralysis, had a fine body, and his determination to conquer whatever it was that had smitten him was intense. This fight against infirmity seemed to give purpose and happiness to his life.

"He's marvellous," the señora had told us, with a motherly, wistful note in her voice. "He was an athlete once; perhaps he'll tell you." She rumbled the curly head of her small son. "He's so kind. Horst-Tito adores him."

The child certainly did, and was already embarked on his favourite game of doctoring. He would sit a few yards from Federico, his small pale face composed, serious and expectant under his mop of curls. Presently Don Federico would sit up.

"*Duele, duele mucho*—Oh, Señor Doctor! Oh, is there a doctor?"

Horst-Tito would look up eagerly. "Ah, you are ill, señor? It pains—where?"

"*Duele, duele*," Federico would moan realistically, clapping his forearm or knee. "Quick, Señor Doctor, an injection."

Horst-Tito, his eyes shining, would arm himself with a sharp

spike of grass and an imaginary bag of accessories, and calm his patient.

"Inyeccion!" The spike of grass would prick the supposed seat of pain, followed by application of an imaginary wad soaked in alcohol. Sometimes Horst-Tito would wring his hands lamenting his lack of alcohol. We would all lament, and presently one of us would discover an imaginary supply. After we had all complained of various infirmities and suffered several injections and rubs of alcohol, Horst-Tito delighting in his new patients, we roused ourselves and thought of tea.

We had gone a few yards towards the hotel when Federico exclaimed—"Bauer! I thought he'd find you out."

An extraordinary apparition was coming towards us through the trees. A large, yellowing straw hat crowned a forest of brown whiskers and flowing hair. A dirty piece of string was attached to the hat and to the lapel of an ancient pyjama jacket. A very old pair of Norfolk breeches, such as our grandfathers wore for bicycling, encased the upper halves of his legs, and beneath them were stockings of a greenish colour, of a great holiness, and entirely without feet. The knobbly feet were bare. At sight of us he emitted harsh sounds, waved a tattered umbrella, and bounded towards us.

"You must meet him," said Federico.

That seemed certain.

The creature arrived and stood before us making puffing chuckling sounds which were actually exclamations:

"Ah—*hoch*—oosh—ohee—*pleshur*——"

Long brown hair flowed from under his hat; his forehead was broad, high and pallid, and his eyes glittered as with fever. A luxurious beard covered the rest of his face.

"Herr Bauer," said Don Federico. "This is Señor Thompson, a writer from England."

A mouth opened wide amongst the whiskers, the arms flung apart, the eyes shone with increased fervour, and I began to adopt a defensive attitude, feeling that the vision was about to embrace me. "Oosh—ah, que suerte! Señor, Mein Herr—

Oosh—fellow artist! My colleague!” ejaculated the figure, checking his intention to embrace me. “Colleague!” he said again, and adjusted himself to English for several words.

“Much years haf I waited a colleague. Thees ees loss here—the end.”

After this outburst of good feeling, to which I replied suitably, my newly-found colleague became one of the party, spluttering out noises in French, German, Russian, Spanish, Greek, a little Latin and Guarani, and here and there a word of English. He could not speak a sentence of more than about ten words without using three languages.

“Now,” he said grandly, “I do not write. I take the photographs. I become the great artist!” He exhibited a small and very ancient Brownie camera.

“Yes,” said Don Federico, “Herr Bauer takes wonderful photographs.”

Herr Bauer shook his head lustily and, with many snorts, swallowings and puffings, agreed that he did. “Oosh—ach—moon-light—*la luna* oosh—*mejor*—better always. *Luz—blando*—soft, ach yes, the moon *sobre el* lake. C’est magnifique! *La luna, mein* colleague, ach, yes?”

I agreed that it must be so. He was struggling to control his linguistic abilities and keep his dialogue within the bounds of English, French, Spanish, German, and exclamations of an international character so that we might understand.

He had a passion for photography by moonlight we learned, and would spend hours on the shore, week after week, awaiting the light that he knew must come. Sometimes a girl would pose for him on one of the round smooth rocks, for although there could be little romance in stripping in the sight of Herr Bauer, an Indian girl may enjoy appreciative eyes, and there would be a beautiful picture. Also it is pleasant to stand naked on a rock in the moonlight.

We had been chatting at the hotel entrance, and Bauer had begun to cringe and gesticulate, and the spluttering flow of his language checked as his eyes roamed furtively.

"Here you are," said Don Federico; and he put a nickel coin, value one eighty-fifth part of a shilling, into the man's talon-like hand. "Bring your photographs later."

I was a little shaken by this largesse. That a white man could be so utterly down in this country. Bauer was already ambling away, waving his umbrella, and muttering to himself. The word "bueno," which he pronounced "bwoyno," was the only one which separated itself.

"He has been a brilliant man," said Federico. "For eleven years he lived under a tree in the Botanical Gardens of Asuncion; and for some time he enjoyed a vogue as a fortune-teller. Night after night the élite of Asuncion, even presidents and ministers, would sit round him in a circle while he consulted the stars."

But Bauer had suffered a decline in popularity. People had tired of him, and now for eight years he had lived in a hole in the ground at San Bernardino. Preston told me: "I found him one day near the wharf. He was in a pit we had dug for old iron and rubbish. I let him stay there."

"There isn't anything anyone can do about Bauer," said Federico. "If he has money it goes on hot caña. He insists that he's a tourist and that he's only waiting for his 'papers' before he travels again."

We had tea and then wandered out to see the life and industry of the village. Federico cut himself a stout stick and clouted stones energetically as we walked. The señora said: "Don Federico would be lost without his *palo*."

Whenever he clouted a stone well he was as pleased as any hopeful eighteen-handicap golfer after a good drive.

"Momentito!" Federico squared to a fine brick. "Whoosh! A fine hit, eh? A good *palo* this." He shook the stick aloft.

If we had come across a tarantula Federico would certainly have clouted it into the middle of next week.

The village was gay with women this Saturday evening, all in bright cotton frocks, their black hair gleaming, and the men watching them in small groups. The señora stopped to carry

on a conversation with a man who was busy thatching his house. He stood on the roof binding small stooks of reed carefully, while three friends on the ground soaked the ends of the stooks in red mud—simply the red earth and some water—to bind them.

“Ai, Don Francisco!” called the señora; “When will you make a hat for my friends here, a lovely soft hat of straw like the one you made for me?”

“Who knows, señora? Mañana—tal vez—when I have done my roof.”

“Mañana es Domingo, Francisco,” reminded the señora.

Francisco waved a red-ended stook to the sky. “Next week then, perhaps.”

The men ceased their trampling in order to appreciate the conversation and admire the evasions of their friend Francisco. Their feet and their legs above the ankles were red with the sticky mud.

“Francisco makes a hat next week—perhaps.” They laughed.

We walked on, wishing them well with their thatching.

“The Señora Inglés also requires a roof of straw, Francisco!” shouted Federico humorously.

“Oh, wonderful hats he makes,” sighed the señora. “Better than Panama. But we must wait. It is always *mañana* with Francisco—*sin embargo*, he has a fondness for me.”

Presently we came to the cobbler’s shop of Don Bartolomeo, and persuaded him with difficulty to make us sandals of raw hide. We stood our bare feet on paper for him to draw their shapes.

“And for our babies we should like sandals,” said Pat persuasively.

Bartolomeo glowered at the señora—“See what you have done. Do you think a man has nothing to do but work?”

He shrugged—“Ah bien. I will make them.”

We thanked him carefully. These Guaranis certainly had an independent spirit. Not for them the glory of hard work that is said to be so excellent for the souls of poor men.

From buxom Guarani women we bought *ñanduti* that was like gossamer. I spent five of my Argentine pesos while Don Federico clucked disapproval of the extravagance. We paid two shillings each for exquisite table centres. Federico made a noise of horror; the señora was shocked. We found later on that they were worth five pounds each in England, and we wished we had bought a gross.

Horst-Tito was in a sweat when we arrived home. He would not speak to us. We had taken Federico from him, but he soon recovered. Hunched up on Federico's lap, gently rocked, he cried tears of superb sadness as Federico's grating voice chanted a monotone:

*"Se va se va la lancha
Se va se va se va——"*

Horst-Tito bathed in a happiness of sadness as the doleful dirge was repeated, and presently, very sleepy, went to bed. He had not a glance for any of us.

Then Federico coaxed the señora to play her mandolin, and she sang German ballads, lullabies and the songs of Schumann in a voice that was sweet, clear and true, with a rich fullness and strength that was quite unforced. The three of us sat enwrapped while the moon turned the lake into a silver sheet, and all the Señora's ache for her homeland filled her sweet voice with sadness.

CHAPTER IX

PAST—PRESENT—FUTURE

I. HOT CANA AND HOROSCOPES

It was not until the launch had departed with Don Federico on his return to Asuncion that Herr Bauer made his reappearance. Don Federico had said: "Buy him caña caliente and give him a cigar. He'll talk."

Bauer had contrived himself some foot coverings of leaves secured with strips of raw hide; otherwise his peculiar dress remained the same. Under his arm was a bulky parcel wrapped in newspaper.

"Ah, I ha! las fotografias. *Mire!* You like see—*ahora*, nein?"

"I will meet you under the mango tree at Rasmussen's at seven."

"*Bueno*," agreed Bauer, and pushed along by my side, waving the chewed end of a cigar and spluttering his splashy mixture of tongues. I gave him twenty pesos—threepence—and his ooshy thanks followed me within the gates of the hotel. I was foolish, because with twenty pesos he might drink half a dozen hot cañas in the two or three hours before our appointment, but even so, I reasoned, since he was quite unintelligible sober, drunkenness might clarify his speech and broaden him out.

Don Federico had left me easy in mind. There was no reason why lack of money should prove an embarrassment while we stayed at San Bernardino. I had written several polite letters and entrusted them to Federico. One to the railway chief, another to the President, and others to various lesser lights, saying that my wife and I were charmed with San Bernardino and had decided to stay on for another week or more.

Meanwhile Federico had agreed to send a cable to England and another to Buenos Aires. The cost of a cable to England,

he explained, would only amount to a shilling owing to the rate of exchange, and I would scarcely be in his debt. At any rate he would willingly lend us five thousand dollars if we wished. We did not wish; but it was nice to know.

At seven we found Bauer installed like a king on his throne under Rasmussen's mango tree. His chewed end of cigar, still unlit, protruded from his bearded lips, and he waved his straw hat at us within the limits of its string. He had evidently stowed several cañas caliente, but they had only made him lyrical and filled him with content.

He spluttered affably, and grandly:

"La Luna—amigos—and Vay-noos—oosh. She is magnifique! Nein. I sit under this mango tree at the core of the world. I am happy. What more may a man desire? In all this beauty—of Vay-noos, ariba! I am—I am——"

"Have a caña caliente," I invited, and, seeing his chewed cigar-end, "and a cigar to smoke?"

He made a show of appreciating his tattered cigar.

"From this I get the flavour of tobac—no! The smoke is not all. Oosh—pero, perhaps it will be good to sniff the fragrance—oosh the fragrance!"

When he was settled with his hot caña and the fragrance of another cigar was curling from his beard, and we had saluted each other with considerable ritual, making several references to the beauty of Venus, the magnificent slice of moon, the heart of the world at which we sat, Herr Bauer removed his cigar from his undergrowth, his hat from his head, and spoke.

"You, señor—oosh—a writer. It is plain. March you are born! Is it not? Feeshes—. I say to myself en seguida when my eyes see you—he ees feeshes. It is clear." He turned his head to look at the moon and we watched him keenly; the broad pallid sweep of his forehead, almost translucent, the strong line of his nose. His head would have made a model for a Christ.

"You, señora, the Leo, no?" He said to Pat suddenly. "August—the Leo. Ha, ha, the Leo and the feeshes mate."

It sounded a bit odd, a situation more for T. F. Powys than for me.

We agreed that it was so—that he had the birthdates correct, and I, being superstitious, was prepared to hear the worst.

“Ach,” advised Bauer sadly. “I regret—*lo siento*—not until 1937 is your good year come. Of this voyage you will not the fortune make. A small success—oosh, but the war—the war—there will be other war. It will obscure, no.”

“You will have some hot caña?” I asked, for by now caña seemed as essential to Herr Bauer as petrol to a motor-car.

“Bueno,” agreed Bauer, and we learned many things occult and strange.

“The President—the meenisters—all come to me. And now—my colleague. *You* consult me. I am happy,” he said.

I expressed myself as gratified to have brought him happiness and we progressed to the photographs. His sense of design was perfect and the manner in which he had overcome the limitations of his camera was amazing.

“At the going down of the sun is the time—in the twilight—I take. The day is too strong, the light harsh,” he explained.

I could not do as well with my fifteen-guinea camera as he could with his Brownie, but I am no photographer.

Two cañas later Herr Bauer’s tongue was really loosened; his speech became clearer, and he confined himself to English, Spanish and German. He grew expansive. “I haf travel the whole world.” He waved an arm grandly. “But thees Paraguay is best. El Ultimo Continente—here a man is lost truly.” He leaned towards us confidentially: “I will tell you my theories—the things I haf discover and think.”

It was midnight before these theories were unfolded. They were interesting. The eastern portion of South America, particularly Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay, belonged to Africa. The Guarani was Coptic in origin. The vegetation, animal life, and all the Indian tribes were African types. Bauer drew our attention to the Guarani tongue; the carriage of the women; the pottery; the names of places, many with

that “Mb” prefix common to Africa. Later we visited villages with such names as—Mbuyapey—Mbocayaty—Mbopobo—the name is almost the sound of an African war drum—Mbopobo!

“All thees is Africa—it broke off, no?”

“Interesting,” we agreed.

“Bueno—now the West—and Argentine and Patagonia—they are the same system.”

He explained the characteristics; the mammalia, the vegetation, and how it fitted with Australia and Korea, and had nothing in common with Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

“So, bueno!” intoned Bauer in triumph, drinking his caña at a gulp. “Thees ees two continents—Africa—Australia. Oosh—*pero*, listen well——” his voice dropped to a mysterious whisper. “You haf seen El Chaco—Ah! There is a strange country. Eet belong to eetself—eet is not Africa, ni Australia tampoco! Eet ees eetself.”

“I think we should go to the Chaco for a long visit,” I ventured to Pat. “I wonder if it can be arranged.”

“Yes, bueno,” said Bauer excitedly. “You must go.” He wagged a discoloured forefinger—“I tell you, my colleague, when you cross El Rio Paraguay you go to another world. It is one kilometro, no—mas ó menos—but it is farther than Africa—Australia—another continent!”

Finally we steered Bauer in the general direction of his hole. He had become somewhat fuddled. Under the mango tree there was a huge frog that he wished to take with him for companionship—for he was due to talk for hours yet, and he wanted an audience; but we assured him that there would be another equally large one awaiting him.

“Ah—oosh, my colleague—I am near nature in my home!” he rhapsodied. “Ah la luna eet ees magnifique, and Vay-noos, she—that woman—is pewteeful,” his voice was rambling. “You know I haf my documents—my papers—presently I travel again—I am tourist here—tourist! Eet ees nineteen—twenty year in this place I am—they say to me you are no

tourist you leev here. Disgraceful. I pass by, I say—tourist! My consul arrange my documents. I go—always I travel——”

We left him addressing Vay-noos and the moon. He was a man of very great knowledge. He appeared to be happy. At times he thought he was a king.

II. WHERE NOW THERE IS A LAKE

We began to enjoy life immensely. The fact that we were without money appeared to simplify everything: the urgency of the passing days had gone: there was plenty of time. Perhaps, I thought, we might not leave Paraguay even when the money came. Old Bauer, with his theories, had roused an urge in me to see something of the Chaco, and I had already begun to sow the seeds of an alteration in plans.

After all, the point in hurrying was merely to stretch our slender resources, and the Chaco would cost nothing.

Pat did not much care where we went, and supposed we should go home when we had no money left. I don't think she had ever believed in Bolivia as a possibility. The fares alone were more than all the money we should have available if we could save it all in one piece. Even Las Cataratas del Iguazu seemed a little remote and she had already begun to adapt herself to the idea of staying out the time in Paraguay.

We were not in undisputed possession of the hotel. Two gentlemen from the old Argentine Chaco town of Formosa arrived on the Monday afternoon. They had come, they said, to escape their businesses and restore their health. These two subjects formed their conversation. One had rheumatism, and the other a distressing cough. All day they played *escobar* on the wide verandah, and at meal times they invariably walked over to our table with some offering in the way of potted meat, or some piquant concoction of garlic.

Only once did they try to sell me anything. It was a device for sharpening wafer razor blades. This gadget so delighted the old gentleman with the cough that he played with it all day

and lost many games of *escobar* through allowing it to distract his attention. He urged me to buy a razor using wafer blades, assuring me that if I did so I should never be bothered with buying new supplies. The fact that that was not one of my bothers anyway, troubled him.

But these two old gentlemen did not disturb the peace of the hotel: they added to it. Each morning I worked, clattering my typewriter at a small table under a fig tree, pausing only to shout the Spanish for scissors or cotton or a needle, to Pat, who was busy with the señora designing and making a coat. I had boasted of Pat's prowess as a dress designer and the señora had not wasted time in turning her to account.

I worked so fast during this week that I ran out of paper, but one of the old gentlemen helped me out, and I turned out ten thousand words under the heading NELLO SARTI Almacen, FORMOSA, and the information that groceries, agricultural implements, saddlery, fabrics, and everything else he could think of could be purchased at his store.

With the call to almuerzo at a quarter-past eleven all this activity ended and we considered ourselves free. The days assumed an easy rhythm. We wandered over the hills and played with the thought of sending for our children and living for at least five years in this paradise. Sitting on the heights above the hotel, looking out over the lake, it was easy to indulge such dreams. For a hundred a year or so we could live in luxury and save money. As an idea it had its appeal and we indulged it freely. It gave us a kind of proprietary feeling as we strolled in the gardens, and inspected the "quinta" of Don Roberto with the señora, or rowed on the lake under the stars, or danced to the gramophone in the stone courtyard.

Horst-Tito, I said, could do with companionship. Our children would learn German, Spanish and Guarani. Two of these languages could not fail to be useful. And then there was all this fruit. . . . Don Roberto's *quinta* covered about twenty hectares of land two or three kilometres from the hotel, and provided fruits, vegetables, sugar and nuts in abundance.

The señora fastened on to this dream of mine, and re-discovered for us, and for herself, the delights of the place. Lazing under the straw-roofed shelter of the Paraguayan family who tended the quinta being served with maté by two Bolivian prisoners, we argued also of the world, and with each argument it seemed more certain that children would be more likely to grow to maturity on the shores of Lake Ypacarai than in Europe.

This led naturally to Adolf Hitler, and the Señora was loud in her defence of the "saviour of the fatherland." This was fortunate. So horrified was the señora that we should think Hitler any kind of threat to the peace of Europe that she introduced us to other members of the German colony.

One of these had built a small house on the shores of the lake about a league from the hotel, and almost that distance from his nearest neighbour. In this little German house, with a bow roof of old rust-coloured tiles, he lived with a sister, guarded by two immense Alsatian wolf dogs. From him I learned that many of his countrymen in Paraguay had come from German East Africa and would not be happy until they worked again under the flag of the Fatherland.

"Soon," he said, "The Führer will gain us colonies. We work for Germany."

But he was most interesting when he talked of Paraguay and its history. Already he had found stone axe-heads, knives, spear and arrow-heads, and recently had dug up good examples of pottery. He hoped soon to unearth a skeleton, and invited us to join him.

We were fortunate. We had arrived at a time when the lake was lower than it had ever been (since it became a lake) and there were huge strips of new territory uncovered.

There was an old Guarani woman, claiming to be a hundred and twenty years old, who said that she could remember as a child the time when there was not a lake. Very likely this was a repetition of a story told her in childhood and imagined so often as to become real. The ancient hag, who resembled a

dried husk in which there could be only the merest spark of life, spoke the truth. She believed that she could remember the vivid green of the valley and the villages that had once filled the bowl amidst the Cordilleras.

How this fertile valley became a lake I do not know. Possibly efforts at irrigation from the Paraguay river after a long dry spell had been too successful; the cutting of a channel had coincided with heavy rains, and the natural bowl had been flooded and remained flooded. At any rate it was certain, said the German, that the lake covered what had once been a fertile valley, and that it was an ideal place to search for remains.

We set out for a remote part of the lake in a small rowing boat that appeared to float by a miracle. They are not very particular in their boat-making in Paraguay. A boat has a bottom, two sides, and a stern, and these are cut from four solid pieces of wood about two inches thick. There is none of the delicate planking and nicety of curving of a Thames rum-tum. The thing floats, and that is all it is meant to do.

This boat of the German's was an exceptional craft even for Paraguay. It had been long out of water, and the sun had warped and twisted its four pieces so that it was scarcely recognizable. The black sand, as we pushed this piece of woodwork towards the water, pushed up through large cracks between the bottom and the sides, but the German was undismayed.

"It'll fill up all right," he said.

But whether he meant that it would fill with water, or that the cracks would come together, I do not know. Whichever it was he was right. Five of us committed ourselves to this thing, and baling furiously rowed out on to the lake.

I have a suspicion that Lake Ypacarai is one of those annoying stretches of water in which a shipwrecked man may swim to his last gasp and then, flinging up his arms, find himself waist deep, only to die of shame. Somehow, this craft of ours failed to sink, and we struck bottom some fifty metres from the shore, and pick-a-backed the ladies to dry land.

Within an hour we had uncovered half a dozen fine examples

of stone axe-heads, beautifully shaped, some arrow tips and cutting instruments, and some very well-fashioned fragments of pottery, patterned with simple designs.

It was dusk before Pat and the señora succeeded in dragging us away from our treasure. It was unlikely to rain, they pointed out, and the lake would stay where it was for some time yet.

But now the thought of rowing seemed intolerable, and it was dismissed. Some suggested skirting the lake's edge; a difficult business through the scrub, and an addition of nearly two leagues to the short way by boat. The others were in favour of hoisting a sail. The German remembered that there was a small sail somewhere in the boat, and while we were searching for it he cut two bamboos from a clump. And presently we had a mast, and the rag of sail hoisted.

I do not know how we made the journey without sinking. Eventually we arrived, soaked to our skins, at the small German house and drank the potent home-brewed wines the German's sister had ready for us. Knowing her brother's boat, she, like a sensible woman, had preferred to remain at home.

Towards the end of the week a brief note from Federico destroyed our calm acceptance of things. We had not been entirely without fears, but we had kept them to ourselves and scotched them as well as we could.

Federico said simply that he had sent off the cables; that there was still no news. We imagined every disaster it was possible to imagine—even that the war that had been threatening might have become a reality and deluged Europe; our children might be choking to death, their lungs dissolved with the latest super-civilized gas. Although we did not really believe such things had happened the thought of them was unpleasant and we clung to the comfort that if anything had really gone wrong we should have had a cable to say so.

I wrote a cheerful note to Federico, thanking him, looking forward to his visit on Saturday, and adding: "We have an idea that we should like to go to the Chaco; there's really no point in hurrying out of Paraguay."

"Point!" said Pat. "It's an impossibility; but what the devil can have happened to that money?"

It was somewhat of a blight over the rest of that week, even though we discovered many more relics of stone and pottery, and a lot of volcanic pumice and brilliantly-coloured stones.

III. FEDERICO

It was arranged that we should go to the Chaco. To voice a thought to Federico was almost to have it realized, and this thought of mine had fitted in well with his own desires for us.

Frankly I had been somewhat fearful that Federico might think the non-arrival of our money rather curious. At best, it must appear that we had been very careless in our plans. But such things had not occurred to the kindly mind of our friend.

"Paraguay's a long way from anywhere," he said. "You don't realize that. The money has reached Buenos Aires without doubt, and is coming up by post."

"Post!" I exclaimed. "Why don't they telephone? They know we're anxious."

Federico laughed. "Telephone! We don't take the telephone seriously here. No one would pay out money on telephone instructions."

We felt easier. That, perhaps, was the explanation.

Federico's job was the business management of the extensive Chaco estates of Gibson Hermanos, and he was anxious that we should see life and work in this territory.

"There's a steamer from Asuncion on Thursday," he said. "Don Juan, our manager at Loma Porá, will meet you on Friday evening at Concepcion. I have written to him about you. They have been having a terrible time with mosquitos, stock dying, horses losing condition. You ought to know the Chaco."

His voice grew tired.

"Do you know it well?" I asked.

Federico smiled vaguely. "I know it well—yes. From reports. I have never been."

It was one of those things Don Federico could not "bring himself" to do. He told us with a kind of grim relish, as though he had an exquisite pleasure from the painful parts, why he could not "bring himself" to do things.

"I came out here twenty years ago," he said slowly. "To Patagonia——"

We had come up from the Lake, and were stretched out in the sun in the courtyard. Federico found it easy to talk and we to listen.

"They persuaded me to go home last year," he continued, "I had made up my mind never to go. I shall never see England again."

He told us how he had hated the ship at first; and meeting new people, whose pity he felt he aroused. But he had got used to that, almost forgetting that the long journey would have an end. The end had come as a shock, leaving him high and dry, overcome by loneliness, and undecided. His home was in a small town some fifty miles out of London, and while he waited at the railway station for the train to leave, a loneliness such as he had never known even in the wastes of Patagonia flooded him. He had sat huddled up over a cup of the railway's tea, fighting a battle with himself. He had put his home behind him for ever, and now he was coming back. His infirmity magnified itself and became a torment. He saw himself as a miserable ruin of the young man who had left his home for Patagonia twenty years before; only recognizable, if at all, as a caricature.

Several times he was on the point of hobbling from the station, calling a taxi, and speeding back to the haven of the ship that had brought him this futile journey, and would presently take him back—with his memories; his old memories. He would forget all this, and soon it would be only a dream. And he would get used to himself again; used to writing weekly letters to his mother—guarding his secret from her. What use could there be in spoiling her memories? As well as his own. . . .

But he went on. The English fields as they sped past the

carriage windows were as he had remembered them, and he was a young man again, just out of his 'teens, travelling the reverse way, living his twenty-year-old thoughts again; inhabiting the athlete's body that had been his. ' Patagonia—the name had conjured visions of romance. In five years, he had promised himself, he would be back. He saw himself, toughened and tanned, doing this homeward journey, walking the short garden path; ringing the door bell. . . . Mother!

And she (in his mind) after the first embrace, holding her great strapping son at arm's length, pride in her eyes. Only five years, he had said to himself. It will be grand to come home with money to spend, with tales to tell. . . .

Twenty years ago. Even now his mother did not know. She still saw her son like that, and he cursed himself for letting his friends persuade him to this journey. It was too late to turn back.

He lived the full twenty years on that short hour of train journey to his home town; felt again the icy winds and snows of Patagonia, the terrible hardships of the life, the sickness. There had been no doctors, no medical advice. He remembered vividly the deaths of his friends; their rough burials. And at last the cold had screwed him up, and left his once magnificent body a caricature. They had said he was incurable, but he had fought all those years, hoping, remembering himself always as he had been, writing to his mother and sister cheerful letters. At last he had drifted up to Paraguay. Quiet, kindly Federico, everybody's friend.

But he was going home. He found the street; the house—Federico's mouth twisted into a grin—" They didn't know me," he said (and it didn't occur to him that this was natural after so many years, and that the last man they would expect to see on the doorstep was himself). " I recognized my sister when she opened the door. " Yes," she said curtly. " What do you want? "

He was silent for a moment in his tale, and then burst out suddenly: " What do you want? No? That's what she said.

No? . . . I just looked at her, and couldn't say who I was—no? ”

So he had mumbled some excuse and walked back into the town, tortured in his mind. But he began to recover. The crowds in the streets did not give the thick-set slightly bent figure a second glance. Perhaps he wasn't so bad. He remembered old friends and sought them out in their employments, saying odd things to them of twenty years before, awaking their memories without revealing himself. He had taken a keen delight in their annoyance. And then a man in a general store recognized him and shook his hand heartily and gladly—"Why, it's old Fred! Bless my soul—your mother's tumbling over herself I'll be bound! ”

He knocked again at the door of his house, and said to his sister: "I'm Freddy. I've come to see you—from South America." And in a second his sister had given a little shout of joy, and was hugging him, to his astonishment. His mind kept saying: "She's glad. How does she know this twisted thing is me? ”

Federico's voice was harsh as he came to this part of the tale. Because he had wished it, his sister had warned his mother before they met, and he had waited in the small front room, trembling.

"My son!" she said, when she saw me. "That can't be my son! ”

We wished Federico would stop, but he went back over each small moment.

They soon settled to Federico after the first shock of surprise, and he to them; but in his heart, we knew, he wished he had never let himself be persuaded.

"I love Paraguay," he said. "This is my home. Asuncion and San Bernardino. I'm happy here."

The señora came and called us to tea. Horst-Tito hurried round searching for "alcohol," and giving us a few "inyecciones"—just in case; and presently the child climbed to his friend's knees, snuggling his curly head on Federico's chest.



HORST-TITO

See p. 195



BAUER COMES TO SEE US OFF

Facing p. 202

"*Canta, Don Federico—canta——*"

And Federico's voice grated out on its one inevitable note—
"*Se va, se va, la lancha——*"

Man and child were supremely happy.

We were all of us a little sad when Federico left for Asuncion. Our own going was imminent and, knowing that the chances were we should never see San Bernardino again, we felt unhappy. The señora had become a real friend, and we tried to assure ourselves that we might return in a year or two with the children. San Bernardino would be good to think about amidst the rush and bustle of England and the Continent. Old Bartolomeo cutting his sandals from rawhide, unhurried; Francisco thatching his roof, and making hats when the mood was on him; Preston dreaming of the timber, madera and palo santo he might get out of the hills; young Juan growing into a sturdy young Paraguayan; the Germans; old Bauer drinking hot caña under Rasmussen's mango tree and approving Vaynoos; and every Saturday evening the sturdy figure of Federico on the verandah with a small curly-haired child on his lap. . . .

In a short time the place had provided many memories and we left it sadly. Don Roberto, our host, was content for us to credit his account in Asuncion with the amount of the bill, which was ridiculously small.

Bauer, in his regalia and an old pair of plimsolls he had found somewhere, came to see us off, and the señora embraced Pat lovingly. "You'll come back——"

"I hope so," said Pat.

And presently we were chugging back across the lake. Young Juan was chattering away as he collected his fares. The hotel was becoming a white shifting mirage in the blazing heat.

We were hot and depressed as the train crawled into Asuncion, and the numerous small boys who had clambered aboard at the last station fought each other for our luggage. A squad of Bolivian prisoners were being herded together on the platform. It was a hideously depressing sight. Their uniforms

were in rags; their bodies, too, in rags; their faces pallid masks. It was as though putrefaction had not the decency to wait for death and burial.

We went to Federico's office with some misgivings but his first words put us right with the world.

"The safe's stacked with bullion!"

"Oh good! Federico. That's a relief."

He had booked a cabin on the "Mihanovich" for the following day, and the trip to the Chaco was a certainty. We felt richer than ever before. Our credit of £40 had come along by post, as Federico had said it would, but Buenos Aires had held it waiting for instructions—though we had left instructions clearly. \$800 Argentine dollars came to nearly \$70,000 Paraguayan dollars, and we were about as near to being millionaires as we had ever been.

We went out to celebrate, and to buy a few small presents for Don Juan's wife and small son. It was Easter, and we managed to get a large chocolate egg, which, Federico assured us, would delight the child.

"Just stay as long as you like at Loma Porá. Don Juan will meet you in Concepcion, three-fifty miles up river from here. You'll enjoy it."

We were sure we should, and we made Federico dine with us and tell us stories, usually gruesome ones, of his life in Asuncion. Federico, it seemed, was the champion burier, and the local undertaker had promised him a free coffin in view of the large amount of business Federico had steered his way. It was simply Federico's willingness to do anything for anyone that brought deaths and burials to his doorstep. Once, when a white man had died suddenly, Federico had had to leave the coffin in his front hall overnight and had scared the Paraguayan servants out of their wits. We felt that if some accident overtook us we should be safe in Federico's hands. He would see us decently buried and write to all our relatives.

CHAPTER X

GRAN CHACO

I. THROWS SOME LIGHT ON THE VARIED DUTIES OF VICE-CONSULS

THE "Motonave" 'Ciudad de Concepcion' was a trim little river ship; smaller, more compact and friendly than the larger boats plying from Buenos Aires, and we had a comfortable threesome cabin aft, with a door straight out onto the deck.

Three-bunk cabins seem to be fairly general on the river boats, and Pat used not to feel sure, until we finally retired at night, that we should be alone. We always were.

Special care had been taken for our comfort. The long arm of Don Alberto's power, we found, was still reaching out for our benefit. We had a letter couched in the most elegant terms recommending the Captain to care for us—which, of course, he could not do, having his time occupied in navigating the ship.

A few smartly-dressed European women stood about on the wharf, seeming ungainly on their high heels amongst the sandalled, easy-moving Paraguayans, and misshapen in their tight-fitting costumes and last year's absurd hats. The lack of grace in modern fashions glared in the throng of shawled and full-skirted native women. The decks of the ship were alive with soldiers, clasping each other and various relations in fond embraces. Concepcion, our destination, was the first step on the road to the war.

We withdrew forrard on the top deck in order to observe the Captain with a view to presenting our letter, or not presenting it, according to his looks. He was a sturdy little man, with the strong features and brown skin of the Guarani, and we decided

—yes—as soon as he had attended to the business of sailing.

But we were in luck. Coming up the gangway with the young, white-flannelled and brightly-blazered English youth from the consulate (how queer our clothes must seem to natives) was the American Vice-Consul, clearly set for travel, and two beautiful ladies, clearly set for saying good-bye. Luck had delivered the U.S. Vice-Consul into our hands; there would be no escape for him: possibly, being new to the country, he might welcome the company of two people speaking a language in many ways similar to his own; possibly, he might even like to give us “de woiks” on certain matters, such as U.S. army uniforms for Bolivian troops, and the machinations of S.O.C.O.B.

We roved towards the consular group, acknowledging the greeting of the youth in the blazer, so that he should point us out to the American, who would then make himself known to us later.

At five o'clock in the afternoon we sailed. We felt good. For the first time on the whole journey we had money enough for our needs several weeks ahead, and \$50,000 Paraguayan pesos still reposed in Federico's safe. If I could manage to save this sum until we reached Buenos Aires I thought I should reach Bolivia. It made a tremendous difference in our feelings, opening us out to enjoy life freely and giving us a sense of rest.

The sun set as we drew level with the low buildings of Villa Hayes, and the short twilight gave us no chance to wave to the English exile at Piquete-cué. The long low shelter of the six hundred prisoners was faintly discernible, a black line against the hillside, and above it a light glimmered from the small homestead.

All this time the Captain had kept us company, leaning with us on the rail, telling us of the river, the fine fishing that we should have—if we were lucky—the shooting, and the amazing bird life of the Chaco, and now the young Vice-Consul hovered in the background, introduced himself, and we went below for cocktails.

He was as pleased to find us as we were him, I think. We arranged a table together, and agreed a "Yankee" shout for the wine bill. He had been only a year in the country, and was beginning to like it. I asked him whether he didn't find the life quiet after the United States? But no, he said, in the crisp, twangy, monotone Americans have; he found it real interesting at times, and amusing. Consular duties are by no means uneventful.

"Almost my first job when I got here," he told us, "was to rescue an old woman, a United States citizen, down in Corrientes."

She had been taken ill at Corrientes on the way up river, and had been rescued by one of the expensive private nursing homes that abound for anyone suspected of having money. At that time, he told us, he knew a couple of words of Spanish, and they sounded pretty queer the way he said them with his strong American accent. He had the devil's own job to get her out of the doctors' clutches. The poor old dame represented an income to these vultures for a year or two, and they threatened writs, law-suits, and even violence. But he got her away, and on board a boat bound for Buenos Aires.

By that time he was nurse and general servant combined, and the old lady's wandering mind soon invested him with yet another rôle. He was scared stiff she would die on his hands, and there might be hell to pay—apart from that she was a nice old lady.

Almost from the start she was quite sure that the young Consul was her brother Willy, aged seventy. "Wully," she would shout in a kind of dry croak, "don't be a fool, Wully—calling *me* Mrs. Finkelhoffer!"

So he would dutifully address her as "Ellen dear" until in a lucid moment she would screech: "Enough of that, young man. You may have rescued me from the vultures, but my name's Mrs. Finkelhoffer——"

"O.K., Mrs. Finkelhoffer——"

" Oh, Wully—Wully—I've got such a pain," moaned the old lady.

" Take a sip of this . . . er . . . Ellen dear——"

This story as it progressed had us all taking a few sips ourselves, and rocking with laughter. Previously we had imagined consular service to be lacking in amusement. The young Consul's even drone of a voice never varied in tone, and we could see that the job had been a very serious affair to him, and by way of being an occasional nightmare. We could not tell by his voice or manner whether he considered it had a funny side.

Neither of them spoke Spanish, and the old lady proved a pretty good handful for her rescuer, in numberless ways. Pretty soon she had had the idea that she was back home in Pennsylvania, and she could not make out what had gone wrong with the servants. Young " Wully," aged seventy, was ordered to sack the cook two or three times a day, and dared not allow a steward near the old lady. However, in the end he had shipped her aboard a Munson liner out of Buenos Aires, and he had heard she had arrived safely. The real " Willy " had written a very nice letter of thanks, which was a welcome change from the usual virulent abuse that follows most honest help.

It seemed a shame to leave these reminiscences and switch the conversation round to business.

" This war," I said: " My job here is to find out about it. It seems likely U.S.A. knows the inside story——"

The young Vice-Consul became grave on the instant and leaned across the table to me urgently. " There's not a particle of truth in this uniform business, or the oil," he said, and there was no doubt of his sincerity.

I am not under the impression that junior members of the consular service know the secret machinations of their governments; but some explanations are so simple as to carry truth.

The United States government, he told us, had jobbed off thousands of old uniforms. It had been stipulated in the contract that all buttons and distinguishing marks should be removed before re-sale. The likelihood was that the jobbers

had not even unpacked the goods, and had delivered them direct to Bolivia.*

But the oil was not so easy.

"You can take it from me," said the Vice-Consul doing his stuff really well (and believing it), "the sums paid by S.O.C.O.B. to Bolivia are ordinary war taxes in the same proportion as paid by other concerns."

We did not quite take it from him; but his statement was reasonable. In Paraguay the war capital levy had grown to 27½ per cent. Out of a herd of 40,000 cattle a friend of mine had already "given" 13,000 head. In Bolivia a similar levy was in force, and the sum this tax would represent in regard to S.O.C.O.B. might be easily translated into financing the war. Which it was. But not in the way S.O.C.O.B.'s accusers would have.

So that this trip up to Concepcion was very valuable. It cleared my mind of prejudices just at the right moment. Concepcion and the Chaco, I knew, would be raging hives of propaganda, and I might well have assimilated a complete *idée fixe* on these important points.

The Vice-Consul was on his way up river for some tiger shooting (if any). It was his first trip up from Asuncion, and the new country intrigued all three of us. Thick bush swarmed to the water's edge on either side of us; yacaré, larger than any we had seen, stirred the reeds as they slid into the river; flights of birds, Brazilian teal, flamingos and herons, croaked overhead. The river banks had a rise in them, and the Paraguay country had become hilly. But the river itself had scarcely begun to dwindle. Here and there were small *pueblos*; clusters of adobe straw-roofed huts in sudden clearings; great piles of timber stacked on the shore. Once or twice small boats, managed skilfully by men using sweeps from the stern in the manner of gondoliers, struggled out to us, fighting the swift

*Don Marmeto Urriolagoitia tells me he bought some fifteen thousand second-hand British uniforms, and had a devil of a time with the buttons. It was almost as much trouble cutting off the old ones and sewing on new as it would have been to make complete garments.

currents and whirlpools, and did whatever was their business. At Ybapobo a river steamer of two or three hundred tons lay at a rough wharf loading timber. We had thought, until we saw this steamer, that we were hot and mosquito-ridden; but the intense heat was a kind of clamour over that timber-stacked ship; the dark backs of the native crew were alive with flies; and the mosquitos were a plague beyond words. The Chaco was not going to be a picnic for Pat.

Nevertheless she was happy. There was a feel of wildness in the country, and soon we should be in a place that any white girl could call an adventure. So lately out of London, she was now about to be the first Englishwoman in the Gran Chaco.

II. MEETING OUR HOST IN OLD CONCEPCION

Travel in foreign countries invariably means a number of lucky dips. All life does, I suppose. I like this lucky dip business; it gives more variety to life than a change of scene. And you can throw the "lucky dip" back if you do not like it.

But sometimes you cannot. Waiting for us in Concepcion was a man and his wife, as ignorant of us as we were of them; and we were going to live together for several weeks—on terms of friendship. That had to be. It was an exceptionally lucky dip.

As the steamer crawled sideways to the crowded wharf we searched among the Indian faces for a white one. "Don Juan will meet you"—that was all we knew. We had not the vaguest description of Don Juan or his wife.

We said our good-byes, marshalled our suit-cases, and stood by the Skipper chatting of this and that. All at once the Skipper's face beamed. "Holá, Don Juan! I have your friends. Como le va? "

Don Juan was at that moment pushing his way through the mass of dark-faced eager-eyed women on the wharf. He was a tall, heavily-built man, with a very fair skin and a small stiff moustache. He might have been an English farmer. His appearance surprised us. I had tried not to form any mental picture of him, but the process is automatic. Don Juan was

nothing like the vague outline in my head. He was a typical Nordic type; burly; middle-aged, with the great strength some men develop in their forties and hold into their sixties. You would have said he was the last man on earth who would have had a nervous breakdown; yet he had only recently recovered from one.

Mrs. Don Juan, whom we now saw at the back, on the outskirts of the crowd, was a tall blonde big-boned woman, every inch an Australian. Just the sort of woman a man in such a way of life might hope to marry—and might think himself darn lucky if he got anywhere near his hope.

But Mrs. Don Juan turned out to be a Paraguayan—that is to say, she had been born in Paraguay. Her parents had been among that optimistic band of Australians who had sailed from their home land in a kind of modern "Mayflower" to found a Utopian colony in the heart of Paraguay. It didn't work. The last of the Utopians gave up trying to be Utopian years ago, and a few fine Australian types remain.

It was clear that Mr. and Mrs. Don Juan were just as conscious of the human lottery business as we were. We were all restrained in our greetings; taking things easy. A slow start is always best in such circumstances, and for my part, my sudden friendships have proved so unlucky that I am scared of liking anyone too much at first sight.

A couple of Don Juan's Indians grabbed our baggage and skirted the mass of large-eyed women. We piled into an ancient car, and bounced down a red dusty road to the only possible "hotel" in Concepcion.

There was not even the vaguest feel of the outside world in Concepcion: it was a native town, beyond the reach of all but the most persistent travellers. Asuncion assumed the importance of a metropolis compared with it. Asuncion had its English colony, and its Argentine visitors; its special prices. Concepcion was simply Paraguay; the town that had given its blood to protect the Gran Chaco. Some of the finest Paraguayan families had their homes there, though there had been a

tendency on the part of the young bloods to adventure down to the "big city"—but that was before they were all killed off in the early days of the war. Concepcion had no sons now.

The *padrone* of the hotel greeted us unhappily. There was nothing in stock with which to entertain guests; no beer; no whisky; no *caña*, even. But there were oranges, of course, in abundance, and water of reasonable quality. One's ideas on water undergo subtle changes as one journeys farther and farther into these "interiors." The stuff that is bad in London is good in B.A.: good in B.A. becomes nectar in Concepcion, and so on. Water never seems to act as poison if you drink it in its proper setting. We lolled in old wicker chairs, sipping naranjadas and lazily contemplating the flower-filled patio, while hordes of mosquitos settled themselves to feast on our new blood, unmolested—for it was useless to swat at them; there were millions of them and it was best to compose one's mind to them and treat them in the kind of way fakirs have with beds of pins, hot coals and what not.

Don Juan, we saw, was treated with considerable deference. Two or three natives wandered bare-foot on the cool verandah, and he had a way of speaking to them, neither familiar nor "white man," that showed clearly there was not much wrong with Don Juan. Two young officers greeted us courteously and drew up their chairs. One wore a black patch where there had been a bright brown eye; the other had a flapping sleeve where there had been a strong arm. They spoke quietly, without heat, and it was well that the young vice-consul had given us a United States point of view on certain matters. Nevertheless these two young men, recently from the Santa Cruz sector and the fiercest fighting of the war, listened to my second-hand uniform explanations and commented: "Doubtless, señor—tiene razon—but——" The young officer's single eye gleamed into mine with a challenge: "You will have difficulty, señor, in persuading our men, just out of the fighting with U.S. uniformed prisoners."

"I should think it would be impossible," I agreed.

There seemed to be no hope of the war ending. The Bolivians had begun to admit their losses. "We have lost two armies," they had said. "But we have a third equally good."

But the soldiers of both sides hoped for peace. There was a rumour, too good to be true, I thought, that the opposing generals, young José Felix Estigarribia for Paraguay and Peñeranda for Bolivia, disgusted with the abortive peace efforts, were themselves discussing terms on the battlefield. No doubt the two soldiers would have been as capable of making an equitable peace as anyone else.

The war was inescapable in Concepcion; the red dusty streets were deserted, the few shops littered with dusty goods. Yet it was a beautiful old town. Acacia trees, their green leaves heavy with the red dust, lined the silent streets, and it seemed that the city slept, awaiting the return of its men. It was a city of women, tragic hungering women, as all Paraguay had once been a land of women.

Concepcion, Don Juan told us, had suffered terribly. It was her regiments that had held the first powerful Bolivian advance; the "invincible" putsch of the German General Kundt. The *Acá Verá* and the *Acá Caraya*—Guarani names meaning Shining Heads and Monkey Heads—had become immortal. Now, alas, even the *Acá me quedo yo's*,* they joked sadly, had been killed. There is not a man to enliven a woman's bed.

We should have been content to wander a while in Concepcion, but it was not advisable. Travel in the Gran Chaco is a doubtful business, and to be out all night without the accessories of sleeping is to court death. The mosquitos were bad enough to kill penned calves in a single night, and there were pulverins, invisible biters, that made life intolerable. So we ate the fare the hotel found for us; a plate of dry and poor *puchero*, and two or three varieties of black pudding and garlic sausage. Also the *padrone* produced a large stone jar of red wine which he swore was *Chileno*—but we had our doubts.

* This name, in this instance meaning the stay-at-home's, was first used by a brave regiment of Asuncion students who used the title in the sense "Here I stop" in face of the enemy.

Already Don Juan's Indians had taken our bags, and but for the Easter egg Pat still clutched tenderly we were untrammelled. This egg became a major concern for us all. In spite of the heat we had determined that it should arrive to gladden the belly of small Johnny. It had shown signs of wilting, but with care we had hopes for it.

We said farewell to the young officers and left Concepcion in the early afternoon, and set off across the river bound for the Riacho Negro in the most dangerous craft I have ever boarded, and for three hours of the trip (or maybe it was less! it seemed immeasurable) it was a source of wonder to all of us that we remained afloat. The boat, a dinghy, with an outboard motor, was sound enough in its way, but it was loaded to capacity without the upturned barrel amidships in which was perched a spare engine. This had much the same effect as a heavy suit-case on the carrier of a bicycle: the slightest lurch starts a dangerous wobble.

We began by breaking our propeller on some rocks, and it was well for us that we had the spare engine; but the task of removing it from the barrel, changing it, and hoisting the damaged engine in its place was a feat that could only have been accomplished with supernatural aid. The least movement of any one of us set the boat rocking, and I swear there was a light of hope in the eyes of the lazy *yacaré* as they watched our progress. It was at the moment of breaking the propeller that our driver uttered a lurid string of English oaths. This event came nearer to upsetting us than even the changing of the engines, and in spite of our imminent danger of feeding *yacaré*, not to mention the razor-toothed pirhanas, Don Juan exclaimed: "*Jorge!*" accusingly.

Jorge, his face fiery red under a wide-brimmed straw hat that gave him an oddly Harrovian look, stuttered apologetically in Spanish, then pulled himself together and said: "The English Mister and Lady brought English back." He said this very slowly and was almost as much surprised at himself as was Don Juan. In seventeen years no one had heard him speak a word

of English. He had been an English sailor. He had forgotten who he was.

Jorge suffered an acute inspection. We had taken little account of him. His hat gave him the look of an eighteenth-century English sailor and we expected to see a short tarred pigtail jutting out under it. His face was full and cat-shaped, and rough red. A full-rigged ship adorned his weather-beaten chest. Now we came to look at him, he was obviously what he was, but so many people in South America are obviously what they are not that a traveller soon ceases to greet obvious Englishmen, Scotsmen, Irishmen, Germans and so on as such. They are all South Americans.

Jorge continued to look sheepish. Don Juan said: "Blood of a cow," or some similar symptom of surprise. We changed the engine.

There are some things in life that are more convincing of a benignant God, ever watchful, than all the words of the missionaries. This was one of them. We advised Jorge feelingly: we attempted to assist: Jorge swore freely in any language he could think of. Mrs. Don Juan and Pat said nothing: they balanced. But the Deity must have really done the balancing; there is no other explanation.

At last we arrived at a portion of the river bank some kilometres from the main stream. At this point Don Juan and I disembarked and proceeded in an ancient Ford, while Jorge continued with the ladies to a place known as Santa Rita where we were to pick them up. There were swamps to negotiate between us and Santa Rita, and even with two of us this might prove difficult, thought Don Juan. There would be some pushing to be done.

After the river trip, I felt that activities, even in a swamp, would be like a picnic.

III. INTRODUCES GRAN CHACO FROM A T-MODEL FORD

I began to know Don Juan and I liked him. His mind matched his body: a trifle ponderous, but active. He had a

quiet, gentle way of speaking, and it was clear the Indians and cowboys respected him. He had, it appeared, maintained a state of mind rare among white men in such circumstances: he lived normally: he had neither metamorphosed himself into a kind of "Poona Sahib," nor gone to the other extreme, equally common, of living like a hermit, denying himself the ordinary amenities of life. Any luxury that was attainable he attained, naturally. Luxuries did not become important: the only important thing was to live happily.

He had read a good deal, and his comments on the things he had read were crisp and critical. Like all men who live in the jungle he was inclined to be harsh with people who write about it. I have both lived in such places and written about them, and I can see both points of view. If, living in the jungle, one were to be always conscious of "Great heat, vast seas of silence, fraught with unseen beasts," and all that kind of stuff, one would go mad. But a writer is entitled to try to get his "atmosphere" and put it into words.

The most surprising thing about Don Juan—at first, for he was a large man and seemed to be contented—was that he had had a serious nervous breakdown. His fine, strong wife had also been ill. Life in the Chaco, even with the steady, mental balance of a Don Juan, is not a picnic.

We quickly found a common admiration for T-model Fords.

"This is the most important tool on Loma Porá," said Don Juan, as we bounced over the grass hummocks and bent small saplings beneath us.

A T-model Ford is a kind of international link among camp men the world over. I told Don Juan of the old T's on the camps of Australia, and we agreed, as all camp men agree, that "they're the only tools that can get."

But alone we could not have *got* through the swamps that lay between us and our wives at Santa Rita. I was glad Pat was not with us. The mosquitos were grey clouds about us, inescapable, and even a fakir would have had a job to pretend they were not there. Fortunately Don Juan had arranged for

a few cowboys to wait near the swamp; and, hearing our old engine tearing away, they came rocking towards us through the tall esparto grass. Two of them were Lengua Indians from one of the toldos* on Loma. They were good cowboys, said Don Juan, and the other two were Argentine-Indian mixtures. They rode on true *ricados*, the curved trough-like saddles covered with sheep skins that are common to the whole of South America, with variations. The similar-looking arrangements used by the Argentine gauchos are really "*vascos*," consisting of two leather bolsters as a base for the sheep skin. I had always used these *vascos* in the Pampas, and had thought them true *ricados*—*recao*, we called them. At any rate they are equally useful in a continent where a man's horse furniture must also do service as his bed. Personally I like the Argentine *recao* (or *vasco*) best for sleeping, and the Chaco *ricado* best for riding.

These cowboys of Don Juan's were dressed like the Pampas gauchos, except that they wore leather gaiters from the ankles to above the knees to protect them from the savage spines of most of the scrub. Fringed leather aprons were round their waists to take the cut of their plaited raw-hide lazos; voluminous napkins of cloth between their legs give them an odd "nursery" appearance when walking; the usual long knives and machetes stuck aslant through their plain black cloth *fajas*; heavy long-rowelled spurs hung against their bare heels.

In a moment these cheerful souls had lazo'ed the old car, and with many whoops and grunts towed us through the swamp until the wheels gripped again. I was glad their horses looked to be in decent condition, and I was itching to be astride a cow-pony again. Don Juan had told me that it was a hard job to keep the horses fit: particularly, there was a prevalent disease that lost horses the use of their hindquarters, and that was the end of them. Don Juan had tried a new treatment, and had succeeded in getting a smitten horse on its feet again, but it was quite useless for riding.

* Indian villages.

Presently, with the help of the boys in several swampy bits, we came to Santa Rita and found Mrs. Don Juan and Pat taking *maté* and smoking fiercely. The pulverins were beginning to bite. It was like being stuck with invisible pins from which there was no protection.

Santa Rita homestead stood a hundred metres back from the Riacho Negro. It was from here that Don Juan used to ship his cattle to market; but he had not done that since the beginning of the war. It was really the port of Loma Porá. A Paraguayan native family lived in the homestead of split palm trunks, and it made a welcome point of rest on the way from and to civilization. In the last years it had seen a good deal of excitement, for in the early days of the war the Paraguayan army had established a base at Puerto Militar, a few hundred metres downstream, and the three ancient aeroplanes of the Paraguayan command had droned back and forth with ammunition from Concepcion to the soldiers in the front line, until, from sheer tiredness, they had fallen, like dying birds, on the paddocks of Loma Porá. But those three old aeroplanes had enabled the hard-pressed, outnumbered Paraguayans to hold out. Over all this place the war had raged. On Loma was the already historic battlefield of Nanawa; and, once started on that subject, Don Juan and his Indians throbbed with pride. This was no place for arguments.

One Paraguayan was better than five Bolivianos. In those early days the Paraguayans had been down to twenty rounds of ammunition per man. The order had been given: Let the enemy come within twenty metres—Fire! and die. We learned how enemy nerves had suffered, advancing against an unnatural silence; we learned how machine-gun crews had abandoned their weapons in face of wild Paraguayans brandishing machetes, and how similar tactics had even won tanks. (The Bolivians, incidentally, complained of these "barbarous" methods of fighting. They had flame-throwers; gas; modern weapons; Paraguay fought with murderous "uncivilized" machetes. The Bolivian propaganda pamphlets that reached

me bore such titles: Civilization contra machete—civilization contra barbarie.)

And all the time, until they fell, tired out, the three old aeroplanes had flown journey after journey over Santa Rita to Concepcion and back. And now—proudly—the war was “*muy lejos*.” A casual wave of an Indian hand indicated “off the earth.”

But Loma Porá had suffered. As fast as Don Juan had picked his fat cattle they had been commandeered. 13,000 fat cattle from 40,000 in three years. There was nothing left to sell, and no commission for the estancia managers. Now, Don Juan said, he was being paid in Paraguayan pesos, although his employers had kept up payment in Argentine currency as long as they could.

We embarked in the Ford for the journey to Loma Porá homestead feeling that we were all friends together; the first fears had fled. Pat and Mrs. Don Juan took charge of the precious Easter egg by turns. It had caved in severely, but the rest at Santa Rita, they said, had done it good. They were determined that Johnny should receive it while it still retained some semblance of egg shape. Lesser people would have jettisoned the troublesome piece of chocolate and given all their strength to hanging on, as we bounced over the rough ground, falling into sudden pits two or three feet deep where the stoneless earth had caved in, and being eaten alive by every imaginable winged and crawling insect.

We enjoyed that rough journey through the Gran Chaco. It was new, really new; something entirely different. It was not just a wilderness of jungle or desert that might have been anywhere, Brazil, Africa, India. It had its own personality. It was Gran Chaco, strangest place on earth.

Palms of all sizes sprang from the tufted grass, and the knobbly tops of the taller palms stood like dark pom-poms against a blue curtain. Carandai, Don Juan called these palms. They were different from those of Paraguay, and there were some with hearts that were succulent and sweet as nuts.

There was a feeling of openness in the country; a feeling that one could see a good distance; that there would be a clearing, a homestead just round the next lot of palms. But there never is; the country just goes on and on endlessly. Even Don Juan found it easy to lose himself on his home paddocks if he was not careful, and I found it impossible to keep my sense of direction. This is not a strong point with me, but in my days on the Pampas I had never been altogether lost.

Huge clumps of cactus, with spines six inches long, reared almost to the tops of the palms; the spiky frills of wild pineapples showed between the tufts of esparto grass; grey secretary birds walked sedately on tall thin legs, and in their defiant "I-will-walk-here-if-I-like" manner, and their bustle-y grey tail-feathers they seemed to me like suffragettes. Occasionally a brownish carancho sat miserably hunched on the top of a palm and waited; small birds of brilliant red, yellow and green plumage chased each other amongst the bushes; flights of small green parrots shrieked overhead. Life abounded. Yet the dangerous life was mostly invisible. Huge anacondas wound their vast bodies around trees awaiting their prey with devilish, interminable patience, and Don Juan gave us an account of a fight between an anaconda and a yacaré he had been fortunate enough to see a week or two previously. The anaconda had been unable to find a tail hold, and had lost. They cannot get a good squeeze going unless they have a purchase with their tails. (So, if you fight an anaconda drag it into open country. It only weighs a ton or so.)

But, as Don Juan said, there is not much danger from wild beasts unless you surprise them, and that is unlikely. There were plenty of jaguars, ounce cats and Monte cats, but you needed good dogs to get them. At night we should hear them roaring in the Montes; the harsh chatter of monkeys, and the squeals of pigs—the most dangerous beasts of all.

In all forms of wild life the Gran Chaco excels, but best—or worst—of all, in insects and reptiles. Rattlesnakes wriggle almost invisible against the sandy soil; more than one hundred

varieties of snake from the largest to the smallest inhabit the swamps and the undergrowth, and most dangerous of all is a pretty little coral snake no bigger than a banana.

The birds are glorious. As we rode, great flights of duck whirled overhead, flamingos and herons creaked on heavy wings, and stayed occasionally to watch us from the tree tops.

Amidst all this plenitude of life there is a great waiting silence; only the small beasts are restless; only the silent caranchos, their wings hunched as they sit motionless on the palms, show that death is always near. And of all these wild beasts and reptiles, great and small, there is none so dangerous to man as a mosquito or the minute speck of a pulverin. It is the insect life of the Chaco that makes this stoneless waste intolerable to man and his domestic beasts. It is as if all things are magnified to ten times their normal size. Huge spiders hang on their great sparkling webs; tarantulas crawl on spindly legs; frogs the size of kittens sit ever watchful; ants an inch long wear winding tracks through the scrub, rushing endlessly about their business, which would include eating you alive if you fell from your horse and broke a leg and could not get away from them; and there are armadillos, almost as large as pigs, that are the nearest things to prehistoric monsters a man may see in the world to-day.

Also in this land are a score or so of wild Indian tribes still pursuing their savage rites and customs, though some of them cover their "private" parts in response to the preaching of missionaries—for even the Jesuits had left their mark here.

I had tried to find out from where this land has its name. Some say it means "Wilderness," and that Gran Chaco is therefore "Great Wilderness," but Chaco does not mean wilderness in Spanish. It may be a word from one of the Indian languages. Chaco in Bolivia may mean an estate. I stayed on the "Chaco" of the President in that country. But there is another story that I think is true. In the Chaco there is a bird, very good to eat, that the Paraguayans knew by the name

of chaco. It was common amongst the Guaranis to organize chaco hunts and to kill these birds, so that when a man would say: "Let us go after Chaco" it always meant crossing the river into this territory. Presently it was enough to say "Chaco" when one meant the other side of the river, and the territory took the name of the bird.

In this day and age few lands remain less known. Even in Paraguay the Chaco is sometimes called "Tierra incognita." And so we were happy, whatever the discomforts, to be in this strange country as the guests of two such charming and restful people as Don Juan and his wife.

CHAPTER XI

LOMA PORÁ

I. LOMA

WITHIN five minutes of our arrival at Loma Porá I knew we were in luck beyond my wildest dreams. I had been rather worried as to how Pat would stand up to the hardships inescapable in such a territory as the Gran Chaco. Most of these worries disappeared as we saw the long low shape of Loma homestead, an island in the midst of a sea of palms and esparto grass.

I had expected something a little more imposing than the split palm dwelling of Santa Rita, but essentially of the same type. I was wrong. Don Juan was comparatively newly married, and had seen to it that he brought his wife to the maximum of comfort. He was not of the type that insists on making a hard life harder, and Loma came very near to being a haven of real comfort in a desert of fleas, flies, mosquitos, pulverins, spiders, toads, snakes, centipedes, and every other pest imaginable, and a few almost unimaginable. On a rubbish heap Don Juan had found an old bath, many years discarded by his predecessor, who had scorned such aids to "softness." In response to continued scrubbing by Indian arms this bath, although rough, had become presentable.

The next work of Loma Porá's new tenant had been to unblock the water taps the "he man" had blocked, and to attend to the windmills and the water supply. The mosquito netting surrounding the front verandah, and the wire doors to certain of the rooms had also been repaired, and in place of the usual frame beds, with stretched strips of thin rawhide for mattresses, there were a few real beds.

But in all this comfortable work Don Juan had been assisted by Loma homestead itself. In the whole Gran Chaco there is

not another homestead that could be made comfortable. Loma Porá is an exception and a peculiarity.

Loma Porá,* a mixture of Spanish and Guarani meaning "Hill View" in suburban English, stands on a slight rise or "back." It was built by Tex Rickard; hence its comparative magnificence, its spacious yards, and its outbuildings.

Tex Rickard, it is said, brought with him some fifty Texas cowboys to the Gran Chaco, and I cannot blame him or them for returning to the pleasant ranges of North America. At least he has Pat's sincere gratitude for leaving Loma Porá behind him.

But there are other relics of Tex Rickard's Chaco adventure. I am writing from hearsay, and it may be that he is not responsible for having taught many Indians, Paraguayans, a few Argentines and at least two English people to climb trees in a truly remarkable manner. For the first question they ask of a new arrival at Loma is: "Are you good at climbing trees?"

And if the answer is "No," they laugh faintly, and possibly add: "You'll be surprised!"

In certain circumstances one finds oneself at the top of a tree without recollection of how this feat was accomplished. In much the same manner at the age of ten years I once leapt a five-barred gate, and yet failed to clear four feet in the school high jump. I feel sure the presence of a good bull, or better still, some of Mr. Tex Rickard's "remainder" would serve to raise the world high-jump figures.

Tex Rickard, the story goes, brought with him to the Gran Chaco a fine herd of Berkshire pigs. These pigs he thought would do well. Seldom can a man have been so right.

How the pigs "did" in the time of their owner I do not know, and the legend does not throw light on the subject, but their subsequent doings are in the realm of hard fact, for which we can vouch, having seen and "done" with our own eyes and limbs. Mr. Rickard, it seemed, did not consider his pigs worth their return passage money. He left them. They were happy

* *Loma* (Spanish)—back. *Porá* (Guarani)—pleasant.



LENGUA INDIANS

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to be left. One imagines them breaking down their pens, exploring happily in the virgin jungle, blinking their small eyes at strange animals, unafraid—for a pig is not afraid of anything on earth, in heaven or hell.

Presently, the Chaco being already well populated with a wild brand of pig sufficiently dangerous, the Berkshires recognized voices grunting a language similar to their own; they found their mates. As with the Pitcairn Islanders, the mutineers of the Bounty, they began, joyously, to lay the foundations of a new race of pigs, and this new race, now flourishing, represents the finest spur to tree-climbing known to man.

The old pigs, the wild peccary of the Gran Chaco, say the Indians, are "*Muy feroz*," but these half wild, half Berkshire—*Qué asesinos!*—words fail them. They are somewhat larger than the wild breed. You can watch an old sow, her waistcoat-buttons flapping over the hard earth, waddling with a squealing litter across a clearing to water as the sun goes down. Watch quietly. Tree climbing ability has improved amazingly on the territory of Loma Porá, and if I ever see a Lengua Indian entered for the high jump at the Olympic games he will carry my money.

So we owed Mr. Rickard many things; all of them good, or at least, exciting. Sitting out on Mrs. Don Juan's scrap of garden, while toucans dipped their huge brilliant beaks into the fruit supply of the small orchard, and pulverins were battling with the citronella with which Pat's arms were soaked while the rest of us battled with the stench of it, we felt unspeakably happy. Humming-birds hovered around us, small pieces of green, ruby and gold fire as the flaming sun lowered.

All through the journey, whenever we arrived anywhere new, we felt happier than ever before and wanted to stay for life. So we sat, the blue smoke of our black tobacco cigarettes winding slowly into the still, hard air; the wildest country in the world surrounding us; the ramshackle grass roofs of a Lengua toldo showing through the palms and the giant cactus, and at our backs Tex Rickard's admirable homestead.

As the sun set and the pulverins attacked with renewed venom, a score of cowboys clattered into the yard raising clouds of dust, bringing a whole tribe of Indian children scampering from their dilapidated low wooden huts, swinging pieces of lariat in the manner of their elders.

We thus saw almost the whole population of Loma at one stroke. The arrival of the cowboys was like the arrival of the one and only train at a small out-of-the-way village. A swarthy, dark-eyed Guarani cook, with her thick black hair drawn in a long bun, ambled lazily on flat bare feet from her kitchen hut behind the homestead, trailing two or three huge-eyed *bambinos* at her skirts. Two young Indian girls, fat and giggling, appeared on the verandah escorting a small fair-haired boy of four, who, finding us (unaccountably) more interesting than cowboys, evaded his giggling nurses, whooped towards us, only to halt within a few yards and waver, uncertain.

"Come, Johnny," said Mrs. Don Juan.

And we made the acquaintance of four-year-old "Juan Junior" whose Easter egg was recuperating in a sack of sawdust and ice we had brought from Concepcion.

The two young girls joined us with nervous cries and giggles. Never for a moment was "Johnny" out of their sight, and his mother had less worry about him than if she had lived on an English country road. Motor-cars are more dangerous than rattlesnakes and give less warning. A rattlesnake may be relied upon to rattle but a motorist seldom hoots.

The great crimson ball of the sun fell slowly into the jungle and a solitary speck of flame marked the Indian toldo. All else was darkness. Lala and Serafina (or Sefarina, as Johnny called her) dragged their charge unwillingly to bed.

There was a feeling of isolation, of being marooned in a great sea of jungle in which ferocious beasts called wildly, eerily, in the night. From the cowboys' quarters, presently, came the sound of voices chanting Indian songs, and now and then a throaty, mournful shout rose from the Indian toldo to hang in the air like the cry of a beast. Behind all this was the din of



R. W. THOMPSON AT LOMA PORÁ

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the night, the hum and rattle of millions of insects, and the croaking of frogs.

We drank *caña* and met the Lawes. Lawes was a charming and intelligent man in the late thirties. The poison gas of the civilized war in Europe had ruined his lungs, and strangely—for the Chaco is not famous as a health resort—he found relief at Loma. With him we mused pleasantly, and with a good deal of reason, on the peculiar facts of civilization, and how the only remaining uncivilized places of the earth were becoming the refuges of those seeking safety, peace and quiet. Civilization has become more dangerous than the wildest and most uncivilized jungle, and there is no tribe of savages equal to the refined and vicious cruelties rife in Europe.

Lawes had married a young Paraguayan-born girl, and had a pretty little daughter, Johnny's companion. Book-keeping at Loma he was entirely happy. There was no self pity in Lawes. His rather long, pale face, under its crinkly black hair, a long cigarette-holder always between his lips, wore an expression of kindly amusement. He did not pine for the things that might have been. He liked what he had.

It is a tribute to any two white men of equal social standing that they live on each other's doorsteps year after year without clash and without loss of respect. It is probably an even greater tribute to women. This harmony the Don Juans and the Lawes enjoyed.

The Lawes lived in a smaller, less imposing, wooden bungalow within twenty yards of Loma. Neither family abused the hospitality or the home of the other. Alternate nights the Lawes visited the Juans; the Juans the Lawes. Mid-morning *caña* or coffee at Lawes' had become a rule. And each evening, before bed, there would be two or three games of *truco* in which, perhaps, Matteo Montiel, the leader of the cowboys, might join.

Both *truco* and Montiel merit description.

Mateo Montiel was a fine full-bellied piece of humanity, whose stomach lolled in a bulky curve over his heavily laden

belt, without impeding his catlike agility. Black moustachios leapt from his upper lips; his eyes were set deep in wrinkles that netted his swarthy full brown face. As a rule a sweaty tangle of black hair matted on his forehead beneath his sombrero. His height was not more than 5 feet 8 inches; but heavy, his legs slightly bowed in their thick thigh-length leggings of cowhide; huge spurs clanked at his booted heels; for Mateo Montiel was a gaucho of the Argentine, not a barefooted Indio of the Chaco. His leather-fringed apron hung from a cartridge-belt bowed beneath his full belly. An S. and W. '44 poked a blue barrel from a worn leather holster; a great curving knife stuck askew through his black cloth *faja* across his broad rump. A black cotton scarf fell loose on the open shirt at his chest, and showed the strong squat trunk of his neck, and did service as a sweat rag. He walked lightly on small feet with the springy, rolling motion of a born horseman. He had a laugh that seemed to split him like an earthquake; a growing rumble that presently burst, so that his moustachios came alive; short strong teeth gleamed in his mouth, and his eyes vanished in their woven nests of wrinkles.

"*Truco!*" roared Montiel—" *Si si—quiero!! Vale cuatro entonces——!!*"

But you probably do not know about *truco*.

Truco is a game of cards. It grew on us. It became a passion. Sometimes now, forlornly, in front of our fire at home we sit with a pack of Spanish cards—with *bastons* instead of clubs; *espadas* (swords) instead of spades; *copas* (or pots) instead of—well, hearts; *oro* (or gold) instead of diamonds—and full of memories, sitting again in Lawes' little sitting-room, or Don Juan's, or at Santa Rita, we murmur: "*Envido. . . Ah, envido es poco—Quiero*" or faintly: "*Truco——*"

And we hear Montiel's great voice, or Lawes' crisp dry mutter—" *Flor—Yo tengo flor!*"

And we are sad, because here no one has heard of *truco*, and Spanish must be spoken. For English is not the language of lies, and you must lie gracefully and like the very devil, with

subtle intonations, misleading references, and great bursts of words that don't mean anything in English, if you would play *truco*—and, by God, you would if you could!

It is the greatest game on earth with cards. It makes friends; it breeds happiness and laughter. It needs skill. It is a passport better than the most imposing seals of a great country, better than letters from the President, better than anything. It will save you being shot as a spy, knifed in a *boliche*, robbed on a lonely path. You will be "one of us." All this and more *truco* means in Paraguay and in parts of Argentine.

It is worth playing for the game alone: even if you are a contract specialist or a poker fiend. I was almost born playing cards, and felt the usual scorn of a card-player, for a game played with "comic" cards and high spirits. When I first saw soldiers playing *truco* on the boat up to Concepcion I looked on them with the good-natured contempt of a bridge player for old ladies at a "rummy" afternoon. "Some footling child's game, old lady."

Two nights later I was sitting at Montiel's side, my *caña* forgotten on the table, alert to find out just what this game was about.

The game began each night at seven and finished at nine. On the third night I began to play *truco*—began to feel *truco*. One day I shall be good at it, but never as good as Montiel: the game is built for such as he; a game for those old sheep men on the Queensland border who sit dourly at poker, lose or win five thousand pounds, and go back to herd sheep. The game is built for men. Women giggle. You may laugh at *truco*—not giggle.

I consider I do a public service by appending a rough outline of the game; not that I can convey a tithe of it in words. It must be played. The subtle voice inflections; the twist of an under lip; the slight wrinkling of a nose; the faint creasing of a forehead; the screwing in of a cheek. . . . Montiel does all these things as an artist. All mean so much at *truco*. My

handicap is that I cannot wink. . . . Alas, Pat can wink almost as well as Montiel.

Not until the third night in the Chaco did I feel the lack of a wink. But we are now only at the first night.

We met the Lawes; we drank a polite glass of *caña*; we met Montiel; we ate a puchero of fourteen-year-old Chaco cow; we went to bed.

"Spine drill," said Don Juan, "is one of the most important jobs in the Chaco. You must sleep well to be good for anything."

"We shall," we assured him.

We took our candle and electric torch. We shone a beam along the wooden verandah. Spiders on enormous hairy legs scurried into crevices; great frogs stared unwinking into the beam; a frog as big as a rabbit crouched with his great grimacing nose against the wire door of our room.

Mrs. Don Juan called reassuringly: "Don't mind the *sapos*, Mrs. Thompson. Let them in if they want to come."

Pat swallowed: "Oh yes—of course——"

"Good night. Sleep well——"

"Thanks—good night."

We let him in—the one with his nose against the door. Pat stepped round him gingerly. He appeared to be content; he hopped a vast hop, and remained still again.

"Supposing," Pat brooded. "I want to get up in the night and he's in my shoe—or suppose I can't find my shoe . . and . . . I tread. . . . Ugh!"

"Shut up supposing, old lady," I said.

With considerable courage and the electric torch she found her way alone to the bathroom. I heard her stammering feet returning; and then they stopped irresolute outside the door.

"Oh, Tommy," she called mournfully, "there's another. What do I do?"

"What can you do?" I said. "Let him in."

Pat came in and crawled into bed. "That's two," she breathed, "that we *know* about."

Presently she said: "Snakes! D'you think there might be snakes?"

"No—no snakes," I said. "Don Juan had a good look."

Unfortunately Don Juan had told her that when Sir Chris Gibson, the Argentine owner, had arrived to inspect the property there had been a rattler under his pillow. Chris photographed it (after death) and has been haunted by snakes ever since.

The story had rather shaken Pat. It was the same bed.

We settled down to sleep. About an hour later we realized we were not achieving sleep. The silence was colossal; sounds fell into it, onto it, intensifying it. It was a background as insistent as the beat of a big drum in a jazz band, but "spaceless." Every small noise showed up on it like blood on a white shirt. Presently I found my ears straining; listening. There was something; a faint rhythm; eerie in the night. It grew.

"Pretty noise——" I whispered.

"What. . . ." said Pat, "aren't you asleep?"

She half raised herself to listen. With the wild howling crescendo from human throats went the stamping naked bodies in the firelight. We did not have to see it; it was that sort of music. It was wild; mad; sinister; threatening. We imagined our throats cut before we could rise. . . .

"The Indians," I said. "In the *toldo*—having a sing-song."

"Nice for them," said Pat.

We yawned; tiredness was creeping over us. A howl, like the cry of a timber wolf crossed with one of Tex Rickard's Berkshire pigs, split the night.

"Pity he remembered to bring his music," mumbled Pat, pulling the bed-clothes round her ears.

"Perhaps he didn't remember——"

The sun was a crimson ball rising out of a white sea of mist when we next became conscious; Johnny's laughter and the chiding giggle of Lala (or Sefarina) chased over the verandahs; Don Juan's voice grunting comments on the day's work to

Montiel was faintly audible; the homely bulk of Luisa, the cook, pushed through our wire door, and the rotund two-feet-six-inches of her adopted Toribio bursting his pants waddled in her wake.

"*Buenas, señor—quiere maté ?*"

"*Buenas, Luisa. . . . Luisa, no tiene té ? Con leche . . . fría ?*"

"*Si, señor—*"

I leapt out of bed. It was five o'clock. Pat made a rumbling noise which is as near as she ever comes to snoring. . . . Mainly she ticks like a clock (in her throat. Queer . . .). She meant she had heard the foregoing, and was not going to wake up even for tea and cold milk. Five o'clock in the morning still remains the middle of the night to her. And always will. . . .

TRUCO

USE a Spanish pack (or a French one), or an English pack without the 8's, 9's and 10's. (Actually there is a 10 in a Spanish pack, but he is also the knave. Use the knave as 10.) Adapt the four English suits to Bastons, Espadas, Oro, Copas.

The game is best played with four people, two as partners against the other two. Each partner takes turns to Boss the game; the dealer is Boss until his partner deals, and so on.

It is the business of the partner to convey to his boss the cards he is holding. The Boss calls accordingly. Meanwhile it is, of course, the business of everyone to find out what everyone else is holding.

The game is largely one of bluff. Information as to cards is given by means of certain signs. Opponents' signs must be intercepted if possible; own signs concealed; false signs given to delude opponents; correct signs substituted to the Boss when possible. Learn also to lie skilfully, giving false or correct information in actual words. Sometimes, even, holding certain cards, it is forgivable to delude one's boss—so long as one takes care to see that he calls.

There are two parts of the game on the same deal and with the same hands. The first is called *envido*. The second *truco*. If either of these words are ever in the mouth of a player for any reason,

he has called, whether he meant to or not. Or, if one was to say: Did I hear you say Envído? And the answer was, yes Envído. Then that would be Envído doubled. Even if not intended.

You must watch your words. Even when calling, disguise them; attempt at times to make it appear that you did not wish to call; that it slipped out—Oh damn! Envído!

Right. Now as to card values and signs.

Highest cards in rotation: (Needless to say all signs must be given swiftly, naturally, almost imperceptibly).

Ace of swords	Raise eyebrows.
Ace of Bastons	Wink one eye.
7 of swords	Twitch corner of mouth.
7 of Gold	” ” ”
All threes	Fold inward underlip.
All twos	Pout lower lip.
Aces (gold and cups)	Open mouth slightly.

No signs for rest of pack. Values as marked.

Sign for rotten hand	Blink. Close both eyes.
Sign for more than 30 for Envído	Crinkle nose.

WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT. (Don't despair. We did—at first.)

Three cards each are dealt from underneath pack (shouldn't matter!)

You must behave at once as you would if playing rather bright poker. Talk, mislead all you can. Look happy, sad; curse, frown.

Envído is simply a matter of score: Two cards of the same suit count 20, plus the addition of the pips. Two honours of the same suit: Knave; horse (or queen) and King, just 20. No pips. For example: Knave and King of cups and any card of other suit would be 20.

A four and three of Gold counts 27. That is 20 for two of the same suit, plus pips, 7.

Thus 33 is the highest count for Envído. (A 7 and 6).

Perhaps your Boss has enough for Envído even without your sign. He may say Have you anything for Envído? In that case he has called Envído, and the opposition can either say “Quiero” (I want) and it is a show down, highest winning. In this case the cards are not shown, but in this you *must* tell the truth.

Should the Boss really want to know if you have anything for Envido, and does not want to say the word, he will say: "La primera—Tiene?" or something like that. Meaning: the first—have you anything?

You can then answer truthfully, or nearly truthfully, or you can bluff by saying—Si yo tengo 32—Envido—or even.—No, I do not want Envido this time. You have then called Envido.

I hope you are getting the idea. It is not easy to explain. The point is, once you have said Envido it is said. You can bluff and lie and call as artfully as you like; even bluff your Boss in order to bluff the other side. And wrap the word Envido in all sorts of words. (There are poems written specially for this.)

Well then: Having called Envido the answer is (not a lemon) either—"I'll see you" (Quiero) or Envido, that is double. The original caller must then either climb down, or say "I'll see you." or say Royal Envido (Real Envido). See that and get on with the game.

I hope it is clear that you can win Envido all night without holding a damn thing if you bluff well enough? (Well, perhaps not quite all night.)

We now come to Truco. Here again Truco must not be said unless meant, and the same obscure methods of saying it apply. Refer to Truco as "Segundo" (the second part of the game; Envido being "primera").

The Boss of the game will instruct his partner (from the signs given) what to play. He may say: play your big one, and at the same time give you a 3 sign. Maybe you have given him the sign for a seven of gold or swords, or an ace of swords or bastons.

However, the opponents, not having seen all this (you hope), may believe your response to his request for a big one with a three is genuine.

If the Boss has not got your signs he will perhaps say "What you wish"—or "either of them"—or some phrase tending to upset the opponents—or "leave it to me." Venga! Come to me.

In the actual play the highest cards take the trick, as in whist. There are three cards each; three tricks. The side taking the first trick, losing either of the others and drawing the third, has won. Hence first trick has slightly greater value than others. Apart from this, of course, two tricks always beat three.

STOP. LOOK. LISTEN.

The game may be played silently, and the winners receive a match, a halfpenny, ten pesos, a million dollars, one piastre—or whatever the single stake may be.

On the other hand at any stage of the game, even before a card is played (after Envído is out of the way, of course—and the Envído calls may have been a guide to you in the Truco. Remember declarers in Envído must not lie. Therefore if a man plays, say, a 4 of gold and he had said he had 27 for Envído he has probably got the 3 of gold. Easy? Good. Onward.) either of the bosses may say: Truco. Now, unless the opponents say “ I’ll see you ” you have won without playing a card.

At any stage of playing the cards Truco may be said. The answer is: Let’s pay ’em: We’ll see ’em (game proceeds to be doubled at any time if you feel you are getting a better chance): Retruco. The reply to Retruco by the original callers is of course: Let’s pay ’em: We’ll see ’em; Or even “ To hell with them: VALE CUATRO! ” And that is as far as you can go.

The opponents then see you, or throw in.

But you see that all these calls may be made without turning a card, or one card, or two cards, or any number of cards. Perhaps the game may have played through until your partner, the Boss, just as you are about to play the last card of all (which may decide the game) may shout: “ Hold: Retruco! ” That might scare them. They might think you have given him the sign for the ace of swords or something, and not see you. You never show your cards unless your bluff is called.

Well; begin playing with your grandmother. Learn Spanish to give it a flavour.

Simple Game? Isn’t it? (You should see and hear old Montiel!)

FLOR. This beats Envído. Anyone holding three of the same suit has Flor, and says so at a suitable moment. A good moment is just as one of the Envído callers thinks he has won. You then say quietly—“ So sorry—Heavens what is there with me! Am I blind? Am I a dolt? Because Flor I have——”

(You see how damn silly all this sounds in English!)

Then possibly someone else has Flor. The someone else will then murmur—“ Ah, you have Flor? Contra Flor! ”

The highest wins at the showdown. Highest Flor is, of course, a 7, 6, 5 in the one suit: 38 (18 + 20).

II. INDIANS

"Did you like the Lengua concert last night?" asked Don Juan at breakfast. "*Chicha* loosened 'em up."

"It sounded murderous," I said.

But the Lenguas, in common with almost every tribe that breathes, are friendly and harmless unless one does the overbearing white man act. (This will also lose a man his teeth or gain him a split head in the honest-tough quarter of any white town.) Friendliness, like drunkenness, seems to be fundamental in all humanity; everyone wants to be friendly; everyone wants to have a drink. Too much of either leads to fights.

"The Lenguas," said Don Juan, "Make good cowboys. A dozen or so from the toldo work for me when they feel like it."

He never pressed them into service; never interfered with them. Now and again he would stroll over to the toldo and grunt greetings for a few minutes, and stand by the *chicha* pot, interminably brewing over hot ashes. The Lenguas are simple folk. They respected Don Juan and worked well for him. *Chicha*, their especial forgetfulness potion, is brewed from wild honey.

"Queer," I said to Don Juan. "how every race has its fire-water. Scotsmen—whisky; Englishmen—beer; Paraguayans—*caña*; Lenguas—*chicha*, and so on."

There is scarcely a race in the world without some brand of "soma," and Indians certainly get the best out of drink: it is an exciting job with them.

I walked over to the toldo with Don Juan. A mob of howling savage dogs rushed out at us, snarling, but the Indians called them off in harsh barking voices. "They'd eat you—those dogs," said Don Juan. They were large skinny wild-eyed beasts.



INDIAN TOLDO AT LOMA PORÁ

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The Indians lay around under their rough shelters of palm thatch; some of the men—those who had worked for Don Juan—wore old clothes. The women were naked but for loin cloths; the old women were as ugly as sin, their breasts like sagging empty sacks. The young girls had round firm bodies but were without grace. They moved ponderously.

We grunted—a sound like mmm—mmm—mmm, thick and nasal; a satisfied sound. The men grunted in reply. As far as my ears could judge this was the only sound made, but it seemed to suffice for ten minutes' conversation. With two sounds, one for pleasure, one for anger, a baby manages pretty well. So do Indians.

The Lenguas were of a very low standard of intelligence; their faces broad, large-mouthed, thick-lipped; their hair dark and matted. They were near, I thought, to the aboriginals of Australia. One or two of the occasional cowboys had a word or two in Spanish about on a par with the aboriginal's "Plurrry fine fella." They grinned broadly when Don Juan said: "Chicha last night—mmm mmm mmm—we heard!"

But conversation was mainly restricted to the grunts of satisfaction. An appalling hag, with greying hair twisted in Medusa-like strands, and with ribs like step-ladders, tended the pot and was head of the camp. I said mmm mmm mmm to her for a few minutes, and sniffed the curling strand of steam rising from the pot. It smelled good—mmm mmm mmm! She was the nearest thing to a living corpse I had seen.

"I don't think centenarians are particularly pleasant," I remarked to Don Juan, as we picked our way between the large tufts of sword-sharp *esparto*.

"Neither do the Lenguas," said Don Juan. "They kill off the old people. That old hag's about forty, and due for killing any time now."

The habits of the Lenguas are not altogether appealing, but I suppose they have their merits, and are founded on sound laws of life as they have to live it. The unwanted aged and the sick are always killed off, Don Juan explained, and also the

young. The Lenguas will not tolerate an overcrowding problem, and do not want to deal with all the questions of overpopulation. Probably, looking at the thing squarely, given birth-control, they would not kill their superfluous children; given old-age pensions, they would not kill the old; given a "panel" they would not kill the sick.

The Lenguas, however, not being practised in abortion and valuing healthy natural bodies, do not like to disturb the normal functions of the body, and so they kill the children after birth and thus do not allow the health of the mothers to be imperilled. It revolts me; yet I do not see why it should.

A small bundle of humanity met us as we came into the yard.

"Toribio!" shouted Don Juan. "*Venga!*"

But the child scuttled for one of the outbuildings like a frightened rabbit.

"Toribio's a bit of a mascot," said Don Juan. "They put him out to die on an ant-heap. We found him, and told them to keep him, but they left him for the vultures."

Toribio was already making cautious movements towards us. I called him softly, and he came, trailing a fragment of raw-hide lariat.

"Luisa adopted him," said Don Juan. "That's why he's so fat."

His small body was a barrel above his short legs. There were dozens of other Lengua children about the place, and I daresay most of them owed their lives to Don Juan and Luisa. The boys would make good cowboys when they grew up. Even at ten years old they were useful at times, riding magnificently; lacking only in strength.

Apart from the Lenguas there are perhaps a score of tribes still flourishing in the Gran Chaco. The Lenguas themselves are probably a mixture of two old races the *Payaguas* and *Guari-curus*. Wars amongst themselves have changed the distribution of the tribes, and accounted for a great similarity in most of them. It is the habit of South American Indians, especially



TORIBIO

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THE BOYS WOULD MAKE GOOD COWBOYS WHEN THEY GREW UP

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those of the more southerly part of the continent, to kill off the men in combat and carry away the women. The pure Lenguas mostly inhabit the Central Chaco, while those in the south-east regions are of a more mixed race.

The Lenguas say that the Chaco is their adopted country; that formerly their skins were paler, and that the great heat of the Chaco obliged them to fashion garments to protect their bodies against the sun.* It seems therefore that the Lenguas must have drifted down from the cold regions of the Andes, and may have something in common with the Bolivian *Quechuas* and *Aymaras*.

There are other tribes which are probably indigenous to the Chaco. They do not feel the need of clothing—until missionaries persuade them to baptism and a sense of shame. Then they dress themselves. But it seems to me a bowler hat is no more pure than a native head-dress* and a good deal funnier.

The principal tribes speaking similar dialects are the *Sanapanás*, *Angaites* and *Súgines* while the *Chamacocos* retain differences of dialect and appearance.

With all these people the missionaries, since the Jesuits of the fifteenth century, who seem to have penetrated everywhere, have interfered. Most of the Chaco races had satisfactory religions already. These religions are termed "legends" and "superstitions" by missionaries, and they are worth a study.

The Indians fear vampires, which they believe house the souls of the dead. To prevent a return in vampire form they break the bones of the dead. They also believe that *Yace*

*Los Lenguas saben perfectamente que el Chaco es su patria adoptiva y dicen que el calor que sus antepasados sintieron, al invadir esta region, les obligo a fabricar mantas de algodón y lana para proteger sus cuerpos contra las inclemencias del sol a que no estaban acostumbrados. Afirman tambien que antes eran de color mas claro. . . . From a Missionary report.

* I was fortunate enough to be presented with a headdress and necklace of Chamacoco Indians. On going to the British Museum to see if they had anything in this line, I found they had what I thought a rather poor specimen. The young custodian's remark, on being informed that I had a perfect example, was: "Oh, yes; the Chaco Indians make these things for tourists."

yaceré, the gnome of the forest, steals children by night. They believe in ghosts; the ring of axes haunts deserted *quebracho* forests; the chatter of long-dead pickers stammers in the old *yerbales*, and where a boat has sunk in the stream the cries of the drowned sing on.

All these things are as sensible as our fears connected with salt, ladders, teapots, cross-eyed men, black cats, and what not.* Most of the Indian beliefs are sound common sense based on the difficulties, curses and blessings of their very hard lives. They believe in an after life, and in a startling variety of evil spirits. They thought the click of a camera gave their souls to the devil.

The missionaries are hopeful of "saving" the whole Chaco, but there is the risk that deceit and treachery may take the place of their present simplicity.

Meanwhile the Indians are direct and simple souls, speaking their thoughts rather frankly and disconcertingly at times, and very ready with nicknames based on peculiarities of body, dress or habits.

When Don Juan had brought his tall bride back to Loma the head man of the Lenguas had called to pay his respects and look the bride over. The head man had studied Mrs. Don Juan for several moments in silence before grunting and saying abruptly to Don Juan: "This your woman?"

"Yes—that's her," said Don Juan.

"Mmmph," grunted the head man. "What a hell of a height!"

Don Juan's wife henceforth bore an Indian name expressive of her altitude. So it is with all men, women and things.

The names of snakes, birds, and beasts are often due to their habits. There is a short Indian word meaning: "Small green snake that crawls in the grass and carries death." An understanding of the Indian tongue is a great help in knowing what and what not to fear. The Chaco abounds in snakes. I have read somewhere that there are as many as five hundred varie-

* I am superstitious.

ties, but my inquiries reveal the numbers as one hundred and seven, of which twenty are dangerous, eight are poisonous, and twelve are biters and constrictors.* Here are the names of some of those to beware of:

Nandurié—Small dusty snake; attacker; no antidote.

Kryri-ó—Spit blood and die in half an hour. Triangular head, criss-cross marking.

Rattler—Eats rats. Is found near houses (if it can find any). North wind brings them out. They seem to be always "out" in the Chaco—North wind or not.

Yarará—Pit Viper. Mottled brown; large as a Rattler.

Mboi Chumbé—Coral snake. Ringed, red, black and white.

Nankaninas—Black and multi-coloured. Ten feet long. Bite is non-poisonous, but often produces blood-poisoning. (This sounds like double Dutch, but it isn't.) Makes sound like a Rattler; flattens himself to imitate *Yarará*. A cannibal; dangerous to other snakes.

Anacondas—Water Serpent. "Constrictors" of vast dimensions. Often up to forty feet, some say ninety feet. Believe that or not. I have not seen any that measured half that.

Kuriyú—Boa Constrictor. Often confused with Anaconda. Has the same pleasant habits of embrace.

There are also several varieties of tree snakes, and a small snake with wings, somewhat resembling a flying cigar. It is good to think that nearly all the non-dangerous varieties prey on their dangerous brothers. Every poisonous snake has about ten non-poisonous ones out after his blood.

We soon fitted into the life of Loma Porá. There were numberless things of absorbing interest to discover. Pat suffered rather badly and her legs were so closely covered with bites that it would have been difficult to place the point of a pin on a piece of unbitten flesh. This made her drowsy and easily tired. She must have a fairly strong constitution to have been able to carry all that poison around. She enjoyed herself,

* Rochelle, the taxidermist of Asuncion, is probably the greatest living authority on Chaco reptiles, birds, and animals.

and saw a good deal of the country, taking the risk of riding astride a comfortable *vasco* several times.

Wherever possible Don Juan took us in the old Ford, nicknamed with justice the "Phenomenon," but our exploits were strictly limited even in this remarkable machine. We would bump and splutter as far as we could in the "Phenomenon," and then mount the horses the Indians had brought for us. Two or three leagues at a time was capacity for Pat, a good capacity, too. She had never mounted a horse before.

On horseback there was no defence against mosquitos. It was seldom possible to gallop or canter in the dirty thick scrub, and the mosquitos hung in grey fierce veils around us.

Apart from the grey strutting secretary birds, moving swiftly from our path at the last moment with a movement rather like a schoolboy fearing a kick in the pants; the flights of screeching parrots; the vultures that would suddenly descend thick upon a tree from a clear sky and disappear as mysteriously; the occasional shudder of a rattler in the grassy clumps, there might not have been an animal in all the land. For wild animals are not easily encountered unless they are hunted with good dogs.

On these rides we learned about the trees and shrubs; the purple blossomed *yacarandá*, a good tree for making furniture; the hard red *quebracho*, of which I had already a good deal of experience. It seems to me almost identical with Australian ironbark—except that, so far as I know, tannin is not extracted from ironbark. There were also *sapacho* trees dappling the green jungle with rose and gold flowers; the *algaraba*, the bean tree from which the Indians make flour and beer. And above and beyond all there were the palms, seeming endless, interminable.

"If," said Don Juan, "the soft white wood of the palms is any good for paper pulp there is a fortune here."

Don Juan had played with this idea; it seemed a good one, but I did not know enough about it to offer an opinion. The wood is useful for little else. Cut into poles and wired into

rafts the soft timber can be used to make bumpy paths across swampy ground; but there does not seem to be any commercial use for the millions of these trees. Fan palms also spread their stiff green fingers like veils against the low scrub; and there is a palm with a heart that is succulent as celery and sweet as nuts. A few blows of a heavy machete soon uncovers the heart, but a starving, weakened man, with only his clasp knife handy, would need all his strength to reach the food the palm holds for him.

We found also *caraguatá*, a kind of wild pineapple that holds fresh water in a leafy cup at its roots. The long, strong, fibrous leaves are also useful for making ropes and fishing lines.

So it seemed to us that there would be little need for a wanderer to starve in the Chaco, though many other forms of death may be easily come by; death from insects, snakes, or wild beasts.

Jaguars are fairly common; pumas, rare; ounce cats, and monte cats of the leopard tribe, plentiful. Their skins, brought in often by the Lenguas, are worth—for some reason no one seemed to know—more than tiger skins, though they are only half the size. Maned wolves and wild pigs complete the list of the dangerous beasts; but deer, tapir, carpincho, otters, anteaters, armadilloes, roaring monkeys, and hosts of smaller animals abounded. Rheas strutted soberly amongst the palms, very tame, and there was one of these small ostriches always in the Homestead yard ready to pry his large-eyed head into a pocket if given a chance. These fast-running *avestruz* give the finest sport of all to men well-mounted and armed with *boleaderos*.

The sight of the *avestruz* brought the old days back to me: the days when I had ridden with a horde of whooping Indios over the Pampas with the grey *avestruz* spreading out in a great fan ahead of us. Much of this was reminiscent of those days already eleven years in the past; and I could no more sit my horse and watch Montiel riding into a herd of young steers while his men sat their ponies, alert, on the fringe of the mob,

than I could watch a game of truco without itching to take a hand.

It is impossible to exaggerate the splendour, the indescribable numbers, the vast, creaking rush, of countless wings covering the skies. The spectacle, when first we saw it, was breathtaking. We came out from the thick scrub to the edge of a swamp, a long oblong reedy strip a mile wide and twice as long. There was not a sound. Two or three small black water fowl paddled unconcernedly on the lip of the swamp in a patch of clear water. Overhead the sky was a pale bowl, speckless.

No pressing of a button to release a giant liner has released the energy that seemed at once to flood the sky an instant after Don Juan's finger had pressed the trigger of his revolver. The sun went out. The sky was black. Slowly it separated into great swirling, weaving strands, solid masses of birds weaving vast curves so that all the world seemed full of birds. Here and there a few tardy flamingos and blue herons spread their huge wings from the swamp, lending sense and design to the mass above them as they slowly circled upwards, making it all real.

We sat our horses in silence. The birds circled lower, lower, the creaking of wings was like a wild screaming wind, the beaked heads stretched out on the ends of straight long necks. At a height they all had the appearance of duck, and duck there were in countless thousands. But as they lowered we made out the giant flamingos, the herons, the cranes, the storks, all five feet or more in wing span; the smaller ones were quail, duck, and Brazilian teal.

Don Juan said: "Don't you wish you'd brought your *escopeta*?"

"It'd be murder with a shot gun," I said. "You couldn't miss with a rifle."

"No," agreed Don Juan. "Couldn't miss; but you'd smash up the ducks, and only get one at a time. All hunting is pot hunting here."

I do not care about shooting birds except to eat; but I shot a toucan so that its beak should be a reminder of all this feathered

brilliance. As we rode home, white widows and humming birds danced before our eyes. In all the world there cannot be such a paradise of birds as the Gran Chaco.

III. WORK ON LOMA

I do not know the exact area of Loma. Altogether Gibson Brothers administer about 4,000,000 acres; a great wedge of land stretching from Loma to the banks of the Pilcomayo. At the present time only a small portion of this huge tract of cattle country is fenced and stocked. On Loma and the fenced subsidiary estancias there were, I believe, some 40,000 head of very fair cattle. Estimating at 1 to 8 acres, New South Wales fattening country, that would give 320,000 acres. At any rate Loma was large enough to get lost on; and very easily too.

It was no light job for Don Juan and his Indian boys to keep this large and very dirty estancia in order. Huge tracts of it were *montes*, or thick forest, or were covered with esparto grass, useless for cattle feed; and there were several large swamps. Water was fairly plentiful, and usually obtainable at a reasonable depth.

I found the thickly-scrubbed land with its long-spined cactus, small fan palms and tufted grasses, as difficult for mustering stock as the viscacha-holed *montes* of La Pampa Central, and was not surprised that Don Juan had a herd of about two thousand outlaws. Most outlaw domestic beasts are about twice as dangerous as wild beasts, and this herd of two thousand mixed cattle was impossible to approach or to drive. As soon as they realized there was any business of that sort afoot they charged, and the only thing to do was to get out of the line of charge as quickly as possible.

Don Juan's only hope with this wild mob was to keep them away from water and ultimately box them up or trap them in one of the rounding-up yards. But when that happens there is going to be some excitement on Loma and, maybe, a few broken bones.

The herd was bossed by a score or so of fourteen or fifteen-year-old bullocks that had outlawed themselves as youngsters and for years had lured other youngsters to break away. All attempts to round them up had proved useless, and if ever they get made into beef they will be pretty tough eating.

We had a good muster of two or three thousand head several days after our arrival on Loma. The Paraguayan army was yelling for more cattle, and Don Juan and his bosses were feeling it was about time they turned a few beasts into money.

We drove three or four leagues in the "Phenomenon" and picked up Montiel with the horses for the last part of the journey. I was surprised at the quality of the cattle. The Chaco, in the estimation of most people, is a swamp, useless to man or beast. I expected to find the poorest types of *criollo** cattle. What I found were *chubut* humped cattle with a strong strain of Hereford, very useful quality canning beasts. The best of them would have frozen quite well.†

Don Juan had had many years of experience in finding just the right type of animal for the country. Pure Herefords lost condition and died in a few weeks. Neither *criollos* nor the *chubut* cattle were good enough in themselves. The problem was to get just the right amount of good blood, and it surprised me how much Hereford they would stand. Anyone unaccustomed to the matchless herds of the Argentine would have thought them very good cattle indeed.

Even so, a poddy calf, alone in a pen, might be killed in a single night by the ferocity of the mosquitos.

That first round-up was great. The wild cries of the Indians and the mournful complaints of the cattle echoed in the scrub. Screeching flights of parrots, and here and there scared avestruz, running in the uncertain manner of chickens from approaching motor-cars, showed that the herd was near. Presently the first cows trotted out of the scrub. A cowboy rode ahead like a

* Native.

† There is not much hope for the Chaco cattle trade apart from canning and there is little to be gained by improving the quality. The freezing and chilling business is tied up by the Argentine.



MONTIEL AND HIS MEN

whirlwind to turn the leaders at the yard gates, and in a moment the main herd, with Montiel's Indians cracking their *rebenques* on their horses' sweaty flanks and riding like madmen, poured like a brown torrent into the yards. It was Pat's first experience of a round-up and I did not tell her that most of the riding acrobatics and the excitement were simply high spirits and quite unnecessary. The cattle were fairly wild but an Indian cowboy would make a fifteen-year-old English dairy cow cavort like a mad steer.

Pat sat on the fence and watched us working amongst the milling beasts. It gave her an idea that there might be a thrill in it, and that a man was not altogether dumb for preferring cattle drafting to polo.

It would be covering old ground if I described a round-up here. I did that in *Argentine Interlude*. But these beasts were wilder than our pure Herefords, and they were used to rough treatment. Any of these cowboys—even Montiel—would have got the sack on a station in New South Wales. They were rougher, even, than the Argentine peons. They rode beasts down for the sheer joy of it, and threw the same beast half a dozen times, lacing the poor animals in their *lazos* so that they looked like kittens after a spell with the knitting. Don Juan knew his men, and we all have our own ideas. Probably that type of rough cattle can stand a lot of knocks—and he let his men go just so far. To the Indian, the Paraguayan cowboy, the Argentine “gaucho,” cattle and riding means all of life; and all life has pleasure in it.

But all these lazo-ings and throwings of beasts made a long job of drafting out a hundred head of fattish steers—we should have called them good “stores” in Australia, Argentine, or England—but they were as fat as they were likely to get in the Chaco. At any rate, Don Juan was anxious to find something worth selling before the next army requisition came along and swiped every beast not in the skeleton class.

In the days following we had several small round-ups of cows and calves, and had a branding in the home yards. That

branding was little short of an orgy. Each young bull calf was hunted; baited; and thrown until its tongue rolled out and its eyes bulged in the last stages of exhaustion. The cowboys knocked six months' condition off a beast in as many minutes. It was heart-breaking. But it was more heart-breaking for Don Juan: either he let the boys have their fun or they didn't work.

The complete infant muster of Loma Porá lined the fences squealing with delight, and those old enough or daring enough ventured a few paces inside the enclosure and added to the general enjoyment by their frantic leaps for the top rail. Young bull calves, as much as a year old, charged furiously with Indian youths clinging to their tails, striving to master the quick wristy twist that throws a beast and requires little strength; others grasped the horns and wrestled madly, narrowly escaping being pinned to the fences. The bellows of the young bulls as they were finally castrated and branded were more mournful than the fog-horns of river boats and twice as loud. But even then they were not done with. As the exhausted beasts, caked with sweat and blood and dust, floundered out of the yard, two Indians stationed themselves on either side of the gate and tried their hands at hoof lazo-ing, often bringing the worn-out animals to their sides with dull thuds, so that they were disinclined to rise again.

Since my experience as a cowboy on the Pampas I had spent nearly five years in the Australian bush, and I found it interesting to compare conditions and to see how the rate of wages has its effect on methods. Don Juan paid his men \$350 Paraguayan a month, that is—taking it all round, irrespective of depreciated currency—about 2s. 6d. a week. On Loma he had, and could well afford, thirty or forty men. In La Pampa the wage was \$50 Argentine a month—12s. 6d. a week—and we had twenty men for rather more work, and had been slightly less rough. In Australia at the minimum legal wage of £4 5s. od. per week we would have perhaps five men for working a similar territory. The result was that in Australia we treated cattle

gently and drove them quietly. Often I have been sent out alone into a thousand-acre paddock to muster three or four hundred steers and cut out a dozen fats. The only way to do that is to go very slowly; keeping the cattle quiet, being wary of the slightest excitement; riding carefully in amongst them and following a selected beast out of the herd. A false movement and the whole mob breaks to blazes.

I have known station owners in Australia who would sack a man for flicking a stock-whip on an animal above the hock, or putting a beast out of a walk.

Well, that's fine. That is the right way to treat cattle; but the question is: given equally cheap labour, and the opportunity of employing numbers, would white men behave any differently from Indians? Judging by my experience I do not think they would. So that, in a way, it would be a good thing for South American cattle if wages were multiplied by about ten. On the other hand, it would be a bad thing for employment.

There can be no doubt in which country you get the greater thrill. In South America, and in the Gran Chaco especially, a round-up is as good excitement as can be had. Pat found it good enough even from the top rail. And along the side of the yards there was a big tree that carried an even more watchful audience. Its branches were crowded with vultures; silent, expectant. . . .

IV. HUNTIN' AND SHOOTIN'

Life was very full for us at Loma. Every two or three days the disturbing thought recurred that we should have to be moving on soon, but we dismissed it.

We were husbanding our slender resources. We were even happier than we had been at San Bernardino. Young Juan seemed to have taken to us as much as we had to him and was often distressed at thoughts of the "pingo"* that would pre-

* The name of a company running a small river steamer between Concepcion and Ascuncion.

sently take us away. In Johnny's language pingo meant river steamer. He had English, Spanish, Guarani and a few dialects to draw upon, and was often unintelligible to all save his mother. This word was almost the equivalent of "bogeyman" to Johnny. His mother had had to be rushed down to Buenos Aires for a serious operation some months earlier, and she had gone in the "pingo." *Pingo* was therefore ominous in Johnny's mind; and we agreed with him.

Lala and Serafina had lost their shyness of us, and took to making the quaint remarks which invested meal times with liveliness, and which, for some days, our presence had hushed. Luisa, the cook, with the small round Toribio always at her skirts, was a dear. The men about the place grinned and had pleasant greetings for us. Lawes had a fund of humour and a gruesome collection of photographs. Dead bodies in the last stages of decay were sometimes to be seen floating face downwards in the yellow Paraguay. What looked like a bundle of clothes in the reeds might be the remains of a man. Lawes would admit that such things are not everybody's taste as subjects for photographic study. Combined with howling Indians, snakes, huge frogs and spiders, they worked in well to make a theme for nightmares.

Leaning against the slip-rail outside Lawes' small office, and watching the Indian children scampering in the dust and dung of the yard, I said to him: "These kids must have tough feet to run about barefoot in all this muck." "They get manured to it," he observed dryly.

There were more dangerous things than dirt and dung. Yet the Indians wear only circlets of white feathers just above their ankles; and at these a snake strikes, thus missing the wearer and evacuating its poison glands. That way is as safe as a house, said Lawes. As safe as a Chaco house, perhaps. I preferred a pair of good thick riding-boots that would defy the snakes, scorpions and tarantulas.

But of all the inhabitants in Loma Montiel stands out the clearest. He had the natural swagger of the gauchos; the

fearlessness; the good fellowship; the laughter that made him a link with the old lions of the plains, Facundo Quiroga, Red Rosas, Artigas. In Montiel they lived as they lived in my old *compañero*, Sombra.*

Perhaps it was because Montiel, swarthy and full-bellied, yet agile as a cat, reminded me of Sombra that I sought his company so frequently. I should like to have seen those two men together; though probably they would have behaved with politeness so hot as to be cold, as they circled each other warily. For these gauchos are of the temper of Dumas' musketeers, masters of their weapons and ever ready to use them.

Montiel and I rode several times together. The Indians were bringing in good sized *ounces*, and there were some tigers to be found.

"Without dogs," Montiel advised, "our chances are small. But there is no harm in trying." The mongrel hounds, seeking offal around the yards, were not much good and usually became bored or got lost a league or so from home.

We did not find tigers; but the fact that we were tiger hunting, with rifles at the ready, dogs running restlessly, small beady eyes watching us from the trees and dense scrub, added a thrill to a ride. Any fisherman who watches a float must agree, for he would be annoyed if he was told he was not fishing just because he did not catch anything. So we hunted tigers.

"When you do see a tiger it may be only two or three metres away," Montiel announced casually. "Some men tremble," he added; as a man might say "Sometimes it rains." But I thought there would not be time to tremble. Shooting would have to be almost a reflex action.

We used '44 Winchester repeating rifles, a type of weapon I have found best for general purposes. The bullet is large and soft and makes a jagged hole in whatever it hits, and is a certain stopper of tigers, pig or puma at short range. Don Juan agreed

with this entirely, but he had bought himself an elegant high-velocity rifle, a Mannlicher, and meant to use it. The trouble with a high-powered rifle like Don Juan's is that the bullet will drill a clean hole about the size of a lead pencil, and speed on, possibly hitting a few other things before it is spent. Also, if the bullet has failed to find a vital spot in its clean course through a tiger, the animal is apt to remain disconcertingly unaware that it has been shot. There are no such unseemly doubts after a soft '44 has done its work.

The rather sketchy diary I sometimes remember to write has one or two entries hereabouts—"Up at 4.30. Rode 5 leagues with Montiel through dirty scrub in search of tigers. Saw two wild pigs, but dogs no good."

We rode out into a sea of white mist in which the heads of the *carandai* palms seemed to float, and presently the sun pushed a great red rim above the mist, dispelling it, spreading a sudden fiery warmth over the world. And it was as if all things came alive at the sun's touch; only to slip into heavy drowsiness as the day wore on. There was a quality of beauty and freshness in the early morning that was dispelled long before noon. Huge silken webs laced the palms and the low scrub across our path, glittering like threads of spun gold and heavy with dew. And in the midst of these miracles of delicate thread squatted the obscene, bulbous shapes of great spiders. Sometimes a spider as large as a man's fist would straddle his lines, disappearing, watchful, behind a palm-frond. Sometimes they would be hanging from a thread, slowly swinging. Once I nearly had one in my mouth so that I shuddered violently. "Qué feo?" said Montiel. "I think I prefer snakes," I said.

Several times we crossed dry creeks showing fresh pig tracks, and would awake the echoes of the jungle with pot shots at sight of a running dusky back in the reeds.

Yacaré were plentiful, but unworthy of our bullets. There does not seem to be any object in shooting an alligator.

We rode so, alert always—for it is dangerous to be otherwise

—talking rarely, our ponies imparting rhythm to our bodies and our thoughts.

All round us rose huge cactus in great clumps to a height of thirty or forty feet; sharp grey spines, six inches long, bristling from the great green fingers of the plants.

Sometimes, if Montiel asked me in which direction the homestead lay I would be completely at a loss, but would hazard a guess. I was generally wrong. "*No se molesta*," Montiel excused. "Any man might get lost in this country." But he knew every inch of Loma; he was invaluable to Don Juan; and he knew it, and never presumed on it.

Our rides did not bring us much shooting but we had good "huntin'."

When we wanted sport and excitement we chose the river and angled for the grand dorados that make the upper reaches of the Paraguay a fisherman's heaven.

V. FISHING

In Asuncion I had heard tales of the fine fish to be taken in the Paraguay but, being without rod, tackle or money, I had not hoped to try my luck.

Fortunately Don Juan had recently become a keen fisherman. Sir Chris. Gibson on his yearly visit to Loma fished the Riacho Negro, but Don Juan had not caught the infection from him. It was a whimsical little Swiss trader that lured Don Juan after dorados. This little Swiss, whom we called Don Max, had a general business in Concepcion and also represented the Bank of London. He was short and dark with a rather fierce fringe of black moustache. His eyes were pale blue; and he was master of a pleasantly malicious wit which retrieved his victims from any embarrassment his words might cause with a courtesy and charm that made them feel uncertain whether he was the most delightful or the most devilish of men.

Slow-witted folk were apt either to be scared of Don Max's barbed tongue or to be unaware of it; but he was altogether

good-natured. A fanatical fisherman, he lent me his best rod and tackle, insisting on using the second best himself. His generosity was complete and perfect. He had a way of lending that made borrowing a real pleasure and dispelled any burden of obligation.

It was necessary always to make a long day of our fishing picnics. While the white mist still swathed the palms, Patrosina, the Lengua general man-about-the-place (and father of the fat and adopted Toribio) cranked the "Phenomenon" and pushed excitedly at the bonnet as soon as the engine roared to life and began to propel the noble vehicle round the yard in the manner of ancient Fords. Meanwhile the Lawes family would be embarking in "Phenomenon II." This was Don Juan's discarded model, and it had a history that still made him regard it with more affection than the ten-year-old vehicle he now owned. He referred to Lawes' masterpiece as the "real Phenomenon," and I believe he would have been ready to exchange cars again at any time.

Mrs. Don Juan, Pat and Patrosina loaded into the back of our car. Luisa hustled along with a vast hamper, and we set out, a roaring, bumping cavalcade through the jungle heading for Santa Rita.

The journey to Santa Rita and back was a fair price to pay for fishing. Relays of cowboys posted ahead to lasso us and drag us through the swamps, and since only one "Phenomenon" could be dragged at a time, the passengers in the waiting car suffered such mosquito attacks as need to be experienced to be believed.

Looking back on those journeys I think it would be fair to say they were quite full adventures in themselves. Often we were marooned and I stripped off my boots and socks, rolling my trousers to the knees to help Patrosina push, while the racing rear wheels plastered us with black mud and slime.

When we arrived at the small Santa Rita homestead, Don Max and the quaint straw-hatted sailor, who had piloted us from Concepcion, were already installed, the *maté* was ready to

go the rounds, and two Indian girls stood by the kettles replenishing the *maté* gourds.*

The Santa Rita homestead contained a single bare room about twelve feet square in which the half a dozen or so of the family slept. Usually there would be *puchero* and *galleta* ready for us, and we would sit round eating the mess and forgetting as best we could that the black hanging mass of flies in the porch was the meat from which the *puchero* had been cut, and that the remains, when as many flies had been removed as possible, would be our next meal.

Usually an hour of *truco* followed. Don Max was a keen and fiery player and a terror of a partner. I believe he sometimes bluffed himself.

"Don Max"—I used to expostulate—"Demasiado bluffó!" and this would set him off in a quiet cackle.

"Bluffó"—pronounced, of course, "bloofó," was a word I coined because I did not know the Spanish for "bluff." The word caught on. Montiel could often be heard muttering "Mucho bluffó" beneath his moustaches, and it was really a very satisfactory expression for *truco*.

After noon we fished. The dorados, Don Max asserted, would only bite in the early morning or after the sun had passed its peak. During the intense heat of the day they swam too deep, and it would have to be a tasty-looking spoon that lured them to the surface.

Don Juan kept a dinghy with an outboard motor at Santa Rita; but the motor had ceased to function. We believed that it had suffered some acute internal trouble that would prove incurable. Fortunately Lawes did not regard fishing as an amusement, and Don Juan, Don Max, Pat, the straw-hatted sailor and myself were able to crowd into the same dangerous craft that had transported us from Concepcion. The sailor, of course, stood by the engine right aft, Pat sat well forrard, Don Max on the forward seat, Don Juan and I on the middle

* *Maté*, used to describe Paraguayan *yerba* is really the name of the gourd. The word "gourd" after "*maté*" is therefore redundant, but makes for clarity.

seat. Thus Don Max and I balanced the considerable bulk of Don Juan fairly satisfactorily, and so long as we did not make any sudden moves we felt we should be safe enough. Our anxiety to be safe had been slightly increased by the sight of a *pirhana* the sailor had caught while waiting. We felt we would prefer to take our chances with *yacaré* rather than with the razor-toothed tiger fish. These deadly fish have deep scissor-like jaws, and have the sturdiness and shape of three or four pound perch. They attack in shoals with such force as to lift their prey, man, alligator or animal, clear of the water. Within a few seconds only an empty husk remains. But it seems they only attack at the sight or scent of blood and an unwounded man or beast is reasonably safe from them.

Off we went, Don Max and I with our lines out to starboard, Don Juan trailing his to port. At a shout from any one of us (or all three of us) the straw-hatted sailor had to respond instantly by shutting off the engine; Don Max, if not the lucky man, had to stand by with the gaff (he liked this more than actually hooking a fish); Don Juan or I would handle the mallet for the coup de grâce—and Pat—well, we had thought she would have to do nothing but look on.

Up to this moment I had very little idea of the size, shape and habits of *dorado*. My informers had only said: "Ah—you wait till you get one. They're great fighters." My rod was rather stouter than a heavy pike rod; equipped with a fine large-gearred reel. The line had a breaking strain of about 70 lbs. A small mesh chain attached a large silver-plated spoon to the line, and under the curve of the spoon was a single hook of happy dimensions.

From all these signs I deduced that our prey were weighty fighters. "Shout the moment you get a bite," warned Don Max. "Take the strain—don't let him have any slack."

A moment later Don Max shouted "*Tengo!*"

The boat rocked. Don Max half rose in his seat. Don Juan wound in his line as fast as he could and I followed suit to give

Don Max a clear field. The straw-hatted sailor shut off the engine. Pat gripped both gunwales and balanced.

Twenty yards astern a fish, a curving scimitar of silver a metre in length, leapt from the swirling water;* leapt and fought, then rushed away wildly, dragging the line in wide arcs back and forth over the straw-hatted sailor's ducking head. "*Venga, venga—amorsita—*" crooned Don Max, and reeled in steadily.

Within five minutes the dorado was swooping this side and that beneath the boat, on the taut line; Don Juan, necessarily at the same side of the boat as Max, pushed the gunwale almost under the water and poised the gaff anxiously. Flips of the dorado's tail splashed water over us. Don Juan lunged. The dorado flashed away from the gaff. "Easy—easy," crooned Don Max. "Now—*ahora che—ahora!*"

Don Juan lunged again, hooking the fish securely two inches above the tail.

We sat back. The straw-hatted sailor wiped his brow with a piece of his shirt; Pat plumped in her seat with a relieved sound. She was soaked to the skin. "Thought we were over," said the sailor. "The señora balanced us——"

We looked shocked. Really—was it suggested that we lacked in courtesy; that we had forgotten the señora? that in our anxiety to have the fish aboard we had nearly capsized? Suggested or not it was so. Pat's soaked skin and our own sodden trousers proved it. But we were all happy. Don Max produced a spring scale from his outfit and stood up warily: "Eleven kilos, señores—a good fish," he announced judicially.

We congratulated him. He lit a black tobacco cigarette and smoked unconcernedly. "You see, señor—it is simple, is it not? Now it is your turn. I will not fish for a little. I prefer to smoke. Your hook will have a better chance," he added generously.

Off we went again. Within ten minutes I felt a vast tug at

*I'm not just being "adjectival" The rocks do give a continual, swirling movement to the water.

my line. "*Ahora-si!*" I yelled. The boat cavorted. I was reeling in fast . . . a loose line. . . .

"*Se fue,*" observed Don Max.

"Gone," I agreed; and saw that Don Max smirked down his nose.

Don Juan laughed: "He bites like a real fish—he's had me before now——"

I sat back and let my line out casually. A huge jerk almost took the rod out of my hand. I debited Max with being less than an artist; and kept quiet.

Again it jerked violently. "*Ahora!*" I yelled.

"This time—yes," Don Max piped. The engine stopped. I was aware of a slight exchange of courtesies in the matter of the gaff. Don Max had it. "Take it easy," he said. His voice conveyed: "I have the gaff. You have nothing to do but to bring the fish within reach. Surely that is easy enough."

He was right. In a few minutes the dorado was alongside; aboard; dragging the scales down to a shade over eight kilos.

"A nice fish," said Don Max. "A very nice fish—I congratulate you, señor——"

We caught five dorados averaging nine kilos in the first hour. I was rather disappointed. The tackle was too strong to give the fish a real chance. With lighter tackle it is clear that they would have proved great fighters, and as good a sport as the salmon they resembled closely. But the South American is a "winch" fisherman. He has not the patience of an Englishman. For him it is enough to catch the fish.

But it was not quite a case of hooking the dorados and winding them in. We lost four good bites. The dorado is adept at spitting out a hook, and if the line is slacked for a split second the fish is often lost.

Nevertheless we had our fill of excitement. Pat worked hard balancing the boat against our shifting weight, and she had time to note the huge alligators that watched us sleepily from the banks. Soaked to the skin, but happy, we returned to Santa Rita; played truco; and within an hour had our first

taste of dorado. It was pleasant eating in the Chaco; but I doubt whether anyone would buy it in an English fish shop. There was a rather pungent bloody smell about it—like that of meat cooking; and the flesh was muddy and tasteless.

Don Juan had snapshotted us with our catch. Don Max posed with his best fish, and handed it to me as soon as the camera had clicked. Naturally enough I said—"No; that one is yours; mine is smaller."

Don Max gaped. He even took the cigarette from his mouth. "Mine is the best one——" he reasoned vaguely.

"But I didn't catch it," I explained, grasping my own smaller fish firmly. His eyes lit up. He gripped me by the shoulders and I thought he was going to kiss me. "*Palabra Ingles—Palabra Ingles*," he chanted ecstatically. "You hear that, Juan? He would not cheat—he would not cheat." Half amused, half embarrassed, I mumbled: "But damn it—I didn't catch the big one." And that only delighted him the more.

A South American would always be photographed with the largest fish. He seems to find considerable virtue in a man's desire to be credited only with his own deeds. The point is that the expression "an Englishman's word" has its own meaning throughout South America. If a South American says "Palabra Ingles" you may take his word with complete assurance. All this sounds rather "old-school-tie" but it is something to be proud of and to live up to.

We fished the Riacho Negro at every opportunity. The largest fish we caught tipped the scale at thirteen kilos, but in the Alto Parana, Don Max assured me, there were dorados that weighed up to a hundred kilos.

"Ah, you are lucky, señor. You go to Iguazu. What fish you will catch!" But he was wrong. He forgot that I lacked rod, tackle and money.

CHAPTER XII

FAREWELL TO PARAGUAY

I. CHACO TRUCO

WHILE we had been in the Chaco the fiercest fighting of the war had been raging round Villa Montes and in the sector of Santa Cruz. We heard all sorts of tales of the terrible losses on both sides; the need for more men; the approaching end of the war. It was this last probability that made me bestir myself to the point of saying good-bye to the Chaco. It was still in my mind that I would reach Bolivia and there were many things I wanted to do while east of the Andes.

The financial position was so unsound that Pat trembled when she heard me elaborating plans. "We have got to cross Paraguay, and go along to Iguaza. Then, I must see the colonies in *Misiones*, and the Jesuit ruins. After that, Bolivia—if the war is still on." I said to our friends at breakfast one morning: "We had better be moving."

"It sounds easy when you talk of it," Pat sighed as we walked out onto the verandah together. "But it frightens me how you're going to do it all. You'd look so foolish if you failed."

But Pat knows well that is the very reason I make such announcements. If I did not say I would go I might argue myself out of it in face of difficulties that seemed insurmountable.

So we were leaving the Chaco, and both of us were sorry. The Don Juans had received us so naturally into their house and made us feel so much at home.

"*Mañana sale el pingo*" Johnny muttered mournfully at breakfast on the last morning.

"Yes, Johnny, but we shall come back," I promised firmly. And I mean to keep that promise.

Don Juan and I wandered round together for a final inspection of the bridges which he was building across the swamps and creeks, and of which he was justly proud. "I'm making a solid job," he told me. "These *quebracho* uprights will never wear out, and we can always replace the split palm floors."

We examined his latest bridge carefully. Only the day before we had had to wade knee deep in the muddy creek it spanned, urging the "Phenomenon" to the further bank.

"They'll be a monument to you," I said. "We shan't know the place when we come back."

One of Don Juan's greatest fears as the war had waged more and more fiercely was that his owners would consider bridge building an extravagance. But in this Sir Chris Gibson was not an armchair estanciero. He knew the conditions on Loma and the Chaco. And he knew Don Juan. The bridge building had continued unchecked, and would undoubtedly prove of great value. Many times during the rains Loma had been completely cut off from all contact with civilization. Don Juan's bridges would change all that.

We discussed the war as we wandered through that last day. "It's coming to an end," said Don Juan. "Sometimes I'm worried——" I said nothing, and we walked in silence for a few moments. "There are thirty thousand men in the Chaco . . . fighting mad . . . killing, killing, day after day. They've the taste for bloodshed. Killing doesn't mean anything to them——" It began to dawn on me what it was that Don Juan was afraid of. "They won't be able to absorb all those men back into Paraguay at once. The worst of them'll band together and roam around plundering——" he finished.

It was a nasty picture that he had in his mind, but it seemed so likely to become a reality that I could not find a hearty phrase to dispel it.

But mainly we dwelt on plans for the future. We had often talked about the Paraguay river beyond Corumba, the last halt of the river steamers, and about the almost unknown country on its banks. I have never seen the beginning of a

river without wanting to see the end, and Don Juan, too, had a touch of wanderlust. I had an idea that by following the left branch of the Paraguay at the San Lorenzo it would be possible to join up with one of the tributaries of the Amazon.

"What a voyage!" I enthused. "If we could get a launch with half a dozen bunks and go right through from Buenos Aires to Para by river. It would be a stupendous thing."

"I believe you are right," he agreed. "I believe it could be done. I'm game to try with you anyway."

We planned it all out; where we could get a suitable launch, provisions and equipment. Mrs. Don Juan was equally keen, and Pat is always ready to go where I go. We would take Patrosina, the Lengua, and a woman for him. They would be invaluable. I would buy the guns, fishing tackle and cameras in London. . . .

"If only we can bring this off——" I said, half to myself, revolving all the difficulties.

"We'll be here, ready," said Don Juan. We shook hands on it and it became a definite part of the future; something to strive for.

As the day wore on I grew restless. I had an urge to look upon the Chaco for the last time. An hour's ride westward from Loma there is a stretch of swampy ground clad in rushes that push their green spikes four feet above the water at their roots. This place is called Marano.

"Let's all go out to Marano for a prow round," I said. And the whole family, including Johnny and Patrosina, piled into the "Phenomenon."

The Marano swamp is a haunt of birds. Tread hastily and snap a twig and the sky darkens with wings. Flamingos, their long spoon-billed heads stretched ahead of their pinkish bodies, fly swiftly in flocks of hundreds, circling the rush-covered patch. Blue herons swing up into heaven and, their anxiety relieved, land awkwardly on top of tall trees in the nearby *montes*. Vast flights of duck swerve across the crimson disc of the sun, blotting it out, and egrets fleck the heavens like snow-

flakes, while a dozen varieties of slim-legged water-fowl croak and splutter in the green water bordering the reeds.

A broad sandy clearing with a few stunted cactus separates the swamp from the surrounding *montes*, and across this clearing at evening all kinds of wild animals came silently to water.

"Go ahead and see if you can get a duck for dinner," whispered Don Juan. We left the "Phenomenon" at a good distance from the swamp and Patrosina led me warily. It was impossible to approach within fifty metres without flooding the skies with a mad riot of birds.

"*Miré!*" advised Patrosina in a low hiss—" *Miré!*—two of them." The ducks were paddling quietly at the edge of the reeds seventy metres off. It was a poor hope for our dinner with a '44 rifle, but it would have been useless to try to get closer. Already there was a furtive rustling in the reeds.

"*Muy lejos,*" I whispered, excusing myself, and fired.

Patrosina was across the clearing and into the reeds while the creak and swish of countless wings beat around us. Presently he came running back, a duck held high in each hand. "Both of them!" he shouted joyfully.

One bird was smashed up by the bullet and the other, unmarked, must have been knocked over by concussion.

The car spluttered along and we all walked across the clearing to the lip of the *montes* where the giant cactus stood like sentinels. Slowly the birds settled again to the reeds and the world was silent. Across the swamp the sun lowered. We were conscious that behind us in the *montes* the restless, fearful eyes of wild beasts were on us, waiting; and often the complaint of a thirsty beast sounded low and near: "Why don't you go away and let us come to water——"

And presently, as the sun rested its fiery rim on the dark mass of jungle, we bumped homeward in the short twilight. Splashes of orange and bronze plumage flashed amongst the spiky green of the fan palms, the sparkling emerald and blue of tiny humming-birds, poised on faint grey blurs of wings, above the huge blooms of tropical trees; the flutter of egrets seeming

pure white streaks of light against the darkening sky. A secretary bird wavered on one leg, head flicking from side to side, and then decided to run. A rattlesnake, flat and almost invisible against the sandy soil, weaved ominously into the thick grass. The pulverins came out in force.

"Mañana sale el pingo," Johnny whispered.

"We will come back, Johnny." We said good night to him as soon as we reached the homestead. "Adio," grumbled Johnny in his small musical treble, and clasped Lala's hand. "Adio!" . . . he muttered furiously, and then—with defiance—"Pingo!" It had become a full-blooded oath.

For our last night I had organized a truco tournament; the first truco tournament known in the Chaco. Montiel was lolling on the verandah; the smoke curling blue from his short cigaro. A nomad, a Scandinavian, who had wandered into camp from heaven knows where and would presently wander out again to heaven knows where, joined the party. He was tall and fair, and very polite. We drew for partners. Pat drew Don Juan; Montiel, Señora Lawes; Lawes, Mrs. Don Juan; myself, the Nomad. We played all against all but it was clear the battle would be between the Montiel and the Lawes partnerships. *Flor* and *Contra flor* time after time added to the excitement of the last deciding game, and a loud triumphant shout of "*Contra flor y resto!*" from Montiel won him my \$200* prize and Mrs. Lawes a necklace of Pat's.

We drank. It was a quiet little ceremony of farewell. The *caña* glowed amber in our raised glasses in the soft light from the oil lamp. We stood around. "Salud, señor—señora—a good journey," said Montiel, and there was a rumble of good wishes, pleasant in our ears.

Presently the company dispersed. Luisa brought the roasted ducks to our table; Lala and Serafina hovered in the background stifling occasional giggles.

After we had dined we exchanged gifts. To each of us Don Juan presented priceless *fajas* of the Indians woven in

* About 2s. 6d.

natural wools; black and white and brown and white; woven into tribal legends. Pat gave her necklace and I my cigarette-case. It was ten o'clock before we went to bed.

From the Lengua Toldo came the vague, eerie howls of the Indians, weaving into our sleep.

I was up before five, wandering round the yards in the half light before dawn, hearing the waking sounds of birds and beasts before I lolled against the wooden doorpost of Luisa's kitchen to sip the *maté cocido* she had ready for me. Toribio, a naked bundle of brown naughtiness, squealed with three smaller bundles on the earth floor at Luisa's feet. It was the kind of simple picture that never fades. Luisa in her kitchen; Toribio; the wired square on raised poles that served as butcher's shop; the strips of dried meat hanging down like dirty flypapers—and behind, the *montes*, the perpetual background, the limitless jungle, with its roaring monkeys, its jaguars, its huge snakes and wild things innumerable.

Smoking idly, my eyes roaming over these things, I thought again of Machila, of old Lencina, and Gomez, and the shy-eyed kids, grown bold, back in La Pampa. . . . "*Buen viaje don Reyi. . .*" It seemed that all through the ten years, while I had grown from twenty-one to thirty-one, my ears had been full of farewells, *buen viajes*, meetings, months of happiness, here, there and everywhere—but always I went on—somewhere new—to the end of the river.

The sun rose, the "Phenomenon" spluttered, Pat sat beside Don Juan; Patrosina beside me. Luisa chewed at her fat cigaro and shyly gave me a limp hand; the children stood in a group and waved. We clattered out into the lake of mist which swathed the esparto grass of the open camp and foreshortened the palms. But for occasional curses we travelled in silence to Santa Rita. Two Indians manned the oars of a rough rowing boat. Grunting pleasantly they pulled us out into the stream and all at once the gloom lifted from us; we were away again; going somewhere new. Life had problems, worries, excitement.

We turned in our seats and waved to the low dwelling of split palms standing in its wild tangle of scrub and trees.

Good-bye, Chaco—*Hasta la vista*. . . .”

II. THE LAST DORADO

I had been sad at the thought of leaving the Chaco and had sat silent, huddled in a thick *poncho* against the cold of early morning, as the “Phenomenon” bumped and chugged from Loma to Santa Rita.

In mid-stream ten minutes later my gloom had lifted and a keen anticipation of what might be ahead had taken its place.

We all enjoyed the long row into the Paraguay river. I tried to explain to the Indians the methods of a boat race.

The two Lenguas joined in the game. The three of us in the stern kept up a steady rhythm of “Erm—erm—erm”; urging with our bodies like coxswains. The heavy boat alternately rippled the water and drifted, as the Indians pulled strongly and collapsed on their oars to laugh.

So we arrived childishly, but laughing and happy, at a point on the Paraguay where Don Juan had stationed a car to take us into Concepcion. We said good-bye to the Lenguas and bumped off. The road was a grassy track with sudden holes and grooves a foot or more deep, where the red earth had collapsed. We passed several small *boliches*. Outside one of them a cluster of seventeen small wooden crosses jutted from the grass.

“That must have been a good fight!” said Don Juan.

It was easy to imagine the crowd of Paraguayans, their blood stirred with wine, their susceptibilities to insult, keened. Knives had flashed in the dark, seventeen crosses bore testimony. All through Paraguay there are small shrines and rough wooden crosses marking the scenes of violent deaths. He would be an impolite killer, inviting death himself, who failed to mark the spot and guide the soul of the killed to heaven.

Some miles outside Concepcion we came to a military camp and a large aeroplane hangar in course of construction. It was a fine structure, built mainly of brick. The fact that there was nothing to put in it would not concern the builders much. It was a nice thing to have. Bolivian prisoners swarmed over the scaffoldings.

Don Juan claimed us as his children to enable us to pass through this place.

Sentries challenged: "Who are you? Where do you go?" "Say nothing," said Don Juan. "They'll love your 'documents,' President's passes and what not, and delay us for hours while they gloat over them and surround you with politeness."

We kept silent but for greetings. Don Juan gave his name. The sentry saluted. "And these?" indicating Pat and me. "My family," said Don Juan grandly.

We roared through the camp, and presently over the red dusty rutted streets of Concepcion. The sadness of the town silenced the heartiness we had maintained. The fine old residences with their heavily-grilled windows seemed to sleep.

Even in the short time since we had last sat in the old hotel and drank alleged *chileno*, Concepcion had suffered. This last week had been the most devastating of the whole war; the Bolivians had followed mass attack with mass attack, German fashion, in last attempts to break the Paraguayan lines. The lines had held, and had counter-attacked savagely. Concepcion had been combed again for any lurking "*Aca me quedo yo's*." It was nearest. It bore the brunt.

We wandered round. Don Juan knew everyone and stopped to chat with full-bellied men, full of years and grey hairs.

"You remember little so and so?" Don Juan would nod his fair heavy head.

"He's dead——"

"And little so-and-so——" a gesture of an old brown hand some four feet above the ground. "He's dead."

"But he was a child——"

A shrug of heavy shoulders. "A child—yes, señor—not too young to die—seventeen——"

"Seventeen! As much as that! It seems only the other day——"

They were calling urgently for 12,000 men to relieve the tired line. Twelve thousand men—where would there be 12,000 men? In Encarnacion maybe, five hundred miles across Paraguay. In Asuncion, even, there would be a few. But here. . . .

We walked to Don Max's store to seek him out for a quiet drink. It was no time for even a private *fiesta*. In the hotel there were two or three young officers just out of the front line.

"Come," said Don Max, "Let us fish. There are six hours at least before the boat comes from Corumba and three hours before you need return, Juan."

But we did not much enjoy our fishing. It seemed rather in the nature of an anti-climax; like going back for a last look. Besides, it was uncomfortable. Jorge, the straw-hatted sailor, in certain moods could be an utter fool in charge of a boat. He seemed not to know where to go, was careless as to speed and steering. He was in one of these moods. A strong wind from the north-east chopped the water into yellow wavelets and there were thick twists of water rushing along like torrents. Whenever Don Juan moved his fifteen stone from one part of the boat to another the rest of us clutched hold anxiously.

It was a bad day for bites. Don Max provided a few realistic pretended ones. Some sweating workers unloading a timber launch watched us as we passed and repassed them at the wharf. Presently we crossed the river. I had a bite. And lost it. Jorge shut off the engine about two minutes too late. He said he thought it was one of Don Max's bites. We decided to go ashore, and as we turned Don Juan got a 12 kilo fish.

This sent us to the hotel good tempered. We drank coffee, and Don Juan thought he had better be making tracks. We said our "adios." Don Max left for his office. Pat and I sat at a small wooden table. The heat was terrific; the mosquitos assaulted us in millions. There remained two hours before sailing time. We sighed, begged some *maté cocido* from the limp host, produced our pack of cards and began to play *escobar*, dismally. The starch had gone out of us.

Presently one of the young officers passed our way and greeted us. He seemed lonely. We introduced ourselves. In a moment we had a four at truco and the time passed quickly. Pat's popularity was at once terrific. An English señora playing truco. It was unheard of. It was a great compliment. I do not think anything could have brought us so much goodwill as Pat's ability to play truco.

The talk soon turned to war. Scarcely a week had passed since the young men with us had been in the thick of the fighting. They were bursting to tell us of victories and strategies. With a stump of pencil they drew maps on the floor, on the tables. Cards represented clearings or creeks, matches troops, tea cups villages.

And so we learned of the strategy of Carandaytay. How the Bolivians, thirsting for water, had died. Finally Carandaytay was evacuated. Within twenty-four hours the Paraguayans had sunk wells, brought up water-carrier trucks, and had enough water for an army on the very site where the Bolivians had died of thirst.

In this story is the essence of the Paraguayan victory. They *knew* the land. Their knowledge beat modern weapons, modern army training, money. The Chaco was a rehearsal for Abyssinia.*

Our boat was six hours late arriving from Corumba, but we did not mind. The time had passed pleasantly. We sent an Indian ahead with our goods and walked quietly through the old ripe town. The acacia trees lining the streets were heavy

* The Italians had not used poison gas when I wrote this.

with red dust. The wind had died. The light of day had faded from the sky. The old houses seemed to stand listless. From the wharf came the vague hum of voices, but for the rest there was silence. We weaved a path through the mass of women watching the river steamer. There was little laughter.

The young soldiers came aboard for a drink with us and to wish us well. Leaning over the rail as the steamer churned sideways into the stream we said good-bye to old Concepcion, city of sorrow.

III. WILD PARTY

Going down river for the first time since we had reached Buenos Aires gave us a feeling of going home. It was the first time we had gone in the general direction of home, and we thought longingly of our babies, of whom we had heard practically nothing. Pat, though she said little and never grumbled, was feeling triste, and if I had said: "We'll go home—we haven't much chance of getting up to Iguazu anyway—and Bolivia's hopeless," she would have jumped at it. But I did not say it. I have flashes of cold reason when everything I have planned shows up in a hard light. I had one of these flashes on the way down river. It was more than a month since money had mattered; now it was going to matter like the devil. My last credit would have arrived (I hoped!) and since I had managed to retain \$300 Argentine, I could muster just over \$1,000 dollars in all—£50. With that I had planned to travel a further seven or eight thousand miles over a period of at least two months, and there would certainly be unavoidable delays, in hotels and towns. Fares, of course, would run into much more money than my total resources—but I did not intend to pay any.

It was in this mood that I got up early and walked the decks. The sun was staining the stressful river with folds of crimson. The *Peñon* showed up black and formless scarcely a kilometre ahead, and I scanned the high full mound of

Piquete-Cué for a last sight of the exile. I would have liked to wave a hand to the large, blue-eyed man with his dreams of England; but I could not find him. There was movement under the long low prisoners' shelter at the rise of the hill. The tall chimney stack of the *frigorifico* was smokeless. The exile was still abed.

It had been a grand journey. Even now, I thought, if we go home we shall have had our money's worth; and memories of lonely exiles, of Federico, of the Germans at San Bernardino, old Bauer, and of Loma, would people our dreams. And they would be pleasant dreams, but for one vague fear—Indians howling over their *chicha*, the myriad eerie sounds of the jungle . . . and, maybe, the sudden murderous yells of an outlaw band of soldiers; or the stealthy figures, creeping silently, heavy-bladed machetes gleaming. . . .

But that is only a nightmare; the kind of nightmare that the Chaco may breed in a man, and may lead even a fifteen-stone Don Juan to a nervous breakdown.

So for a time as we neared Asuncion my thoughts switched off the future and roamed back over the journey, and presently I was myself again.

Asuncion had now become a familiar outline: it seemed home to us. Wherever we had travelled since our first arrival we had always left the bulk of our luggage in the care of Señora Cohen. That we had left most of our stuff in Buenos Aires we had almost forgotten. It was in the dim and distant past.

We felt a pleasant homecoming thrill as we landed, and the man without arms swung up our cases and led us to one of the ancient *autos* we knew of old.

Federico's eyes twitched up at us and his wry mouth split in a smile of welcome as we entered his office. He stabilized the home feeling. He was permanent. Whenever, from wherever, we should come back to Asuncion there would be Federico, ready to shoulder all our cares, thinking of the people we wanted to meet, the places we ought to see.

"Ah, señora—bien venido!" he greeted. "How's Loma?"

"Loma's a good spot," we said. "The Don Juans are grand people. You nearly added us to the permanent staff."

But, as we said it, we wondered how that could have been true two or three days earlier. For Loma was behind us; its spell only alive in my imagination; no longer a thing of substance.

"Sir Chris arrived this week," said Federico. "He's anxious to meet you both. He's at the Majestic."

We walked at once into a warm welcome. Señora Cohen's sturdy capable shape rose from one of the wicker chairs of the tiled winter garden, while a tall dark man in the late thirties came towards us—"I'm Chris Gibson," he introduced himself. "How's Loma?"

Señora Cohen's face broadened and assumed an expression of complete peace. "Ah—with a few more gentlemen like these War might be forgotten!" Gin slings appeared to be a permanent feature at our elbows. We talked and talked. We grew happy—possibly, more than happy. An ancient man arrived. He seemed to my unreliable gaze to be surrounded by whiskers from which his small bright eyes peered like an animal's from undergrowth. He was ninety years old and had fought in the five years' war under Lopez. I cursed gin and strove to focus this living piece of history. Even in more sober moments I should not have questioned him: it was sufficient to meet him: to know the *last* man of an era: the survivor of them all.

Sir Chris wanted to give a farewell party before we left Paraguay, and had already been busy with invitations. "I want the party to amuse you," he told us. "I've asked all sorts."

Towards evening the guests began to arrive and drape themselves over the winter garden. A complete Paraguayan family, including lumpy daughters, sat with wooden smiles; a crowd from Liebigs at Zepallos Cué came in a flurry of

laughter; a young man with a fierce moustache, the bearing of a rather mad guardsman, and the voice of a foghorn, dragged the son of old Willie Hayward by the arm. No one seemed to know who was, and who was not, of the party. Sir Chris had vanished, but presently he came in with a further group of mixed guests and the party began. Sometimes we were in small groups; sometimes we merged into a throng; sometimes we danced; always we drank—and once, it must have been rather late in the evening, we ate. Señora Cohen's face grinned over us periodically and grew more expansive as each cordon rouge cork hit the ceiling. She was making up for the one bottle of whisky sold in the previous twelve months.

We danced to the lively rhythm of the polka paraguayano and swore to introduce it into England. Somebody will call it "Hot Heel Hula" or some such idiotic name and make a fortune. It won't be me. Fortunes elude me.

Next to the polka paraguayano we enjoyed the young man with the fierce moustache. He was one of the hearty type one meets, sweated and stockinged, surging round the corners of suburban roads at about seven o'clock in the morning. "Gettin' a bit o' condition, old man. Turning out for the Scorpions on Saturday." Then they drive a fist into a stomach that is like iron and grunt: "Too much beer, you know."

Without such young men we should not be able to cash our cheques or fight wars but as conversationalists they have limitations.

Robert—or better, "Don Roberto"—was different. He had experience. Somewhere in the heart of Paraguay he had "A league o' camp, old man. Breedin' a few cattle." For five years he had been living alone on his league of cattle country; making disturbing descents on Asuncion when his quarterly allowance arrived from the "old country," and painting the town red. Asuncion, I gathered, was rather like a concertina which he squashed in, and left to wheeze out

again as the train carried him homeward after one of his visits.

He was a nice young man. His Spanish, spoken in the same tone, accent and manner that he used for English, was remarkable and worth hearing. Clever Paraguayans understood it, and the others dared not admit themselves at a loss. His simple wishes were usually unmistakable. Young Willie Hayward was his agent and made occasional contributions to the conversation.

"Whenever I want anything Willie sends it along," Roberto roared. "Don't you, Willie?"

Willie agreed that he did. We all became excellent friends. And at last when the party broke up Señora Cohen was the richer by a round \$50,000 Paraguayan.

There was a somewhat unnatural air of quietness when we awoke next morning. We had the feeling either that it was about four in the morning and no one out of bed, or two in the afternoon and everyone back in bed. It was 8 a.m.

We drank coffee and dabbled with the almost invisible ration of *miel de abeja* Señora Cohen allowed her guests, while Alfredo, the new waiter, with a face like a small grinning cat, advanced small pieces of information.

It seemed that the party had not broken up: it had moved, or more precisely, spread. Bits of it were still in full swing in various parts of Asuncion if one cared to search.

We neither cared, nor had time. It was our last day and we had not begun to say our good-byes. There was a day's work ahead.

Dr. Ayala received us happily. We had enjoyed his country so much that he knew we were not just being polite. Paraguay, I said, was the country I should choose to live in if I ever chose to settle down anywhere. As for the people, I have yet to meet a finer race: quiet, kind, honourable, brave and courteous. I was relieved to hear from the President that the proposed Japanese peaceful invasion had faded out. The Japanese would not breed well with Guaranis. Meanwhile, the German peaceful invasion was maturing. The

Germans will put Paraguay on the map, but the country will not be any the happier for that. The map is not really a comfortable place to be on these days.

We took our leave with mutual expressions of goodwill. The foreign minister, the enigmatic Riart, was equally charming. Within two months he was due to loom quite large in the world's press, and his solid jaw to become the symbol of Paraguay's determination not to be "diplomitized" out of her rights. By midday we had finished with the ministry, and reclined again in Señora Cohen's wicker chairs sipping something simple.

There was still no news of the party, but midway through the second drink Roberto boomed in, barking staccato words of greeting and explanation.

"Chris is in bed," he informed us. "Tired."

He admitted that he had felt tired himself round about three in the morning but had recovered. He had been for a run round. It was clear he had something in his mind, and after a drink he chugged out fiercely: "You must help me, ol' man. Party in difficulties. Rescue work, ol' man."

"Sorry," I said. "I've got all my social calls to wedge into this afternoon. Consuls and what not. It just can't be done."

Robert sat down heavily, cleared his throat, and gave me a look that said, "We're Britons in a foreign land and must hang together." "I'll get you round afterwards," he promised. "I've got my car."

He was irresistible. Pat went to *siesta*, while we combed the haunts of Asuncion, seeking the remnants of the party, haggling with female mountains of flesh as to the ethical charges for carnal pleasures. On one bill there was an "addition" for thirty-two drinks. He who should have paid was dead to the world. Roberto's voice boomed in the corridors of brothels; bare arms clutched at us from cubicle doors; girls in soiled scanties draped themselves about us whenever it became necessary for us to halt and peer into dim bed chambers.

The radiator of Roberto's car sprang a leak and needed

replenishing at each stopping-place, but at last we had completed our duties to Roberto's satisfaction and retrieved a proportion of the party. Never have the sins of the flesh and devil seemed less delightful and more fleshy and devilish than on that hot afternoon.

Roberto kept his word. It cost him nothing, he said, to send us round in his car on our social calls. He had some scheme whereby he bought the car and driver on his arrival and sold them back when he left. By this means fares cost him about \$5,000 more than they would have done otherwise, but it gave him the feeling that motoring was free and pleased him a good deal.

We took afternoon tea with Captain Tottenham Smith, our consul, discussed the present and future of Paraguay, and we promised, so far as possible, to correct the gross misstatements that had been made against the country and its people.

Back in our hotel we found Señora Weiler with Federico. She had come down from San Bernardino, hoping to see us in time to say good-bye, and we were glad that the four of us should have the last evening together. We were all a little triste. If our roots had not begun to grow at least we had put out shoots that it was unpleasant to tear loose. We had done rather more than enjoy ourselves in Paraguay, and now we were leaving, perhaps for ever.

After dinner we walked in the quiet streets, sat in the cafés, imagining them soon to be gay with laughter. Now the war held them hushed. We would have been content to wander aimlessly through most of the night but Federico reminded us that our train left at six and the journey across Paraguay would not be a rest. On the corner of *Palmas* and *Chile*, the Oratory of Our Lady of Asuncion looming black and grotesque in its scaffolding, we said our farewells, and then sought our beds.

On a small table in our room we found one of Marsal's perfect models of a Paraguayan market woman, and with it a short note:

“ For Reg and Pat Thompson
Recuerdo del Paraguay
from Chris Gibson.”

It was one of the pieces we had most desired.

IV. ACROSS PARAGUAY WITH ROBERTO.

At five in the morning we piled into Roberto's car to go to the railway station, and in return we invited him to share our reserved compartment. A reserved compartment on a journey of any length is an essential in Paraguay, even for the beginnings of comfort, and Roberto expressed his thankfulness at meeting us in a series of hearty barks. These barks of his acted with extraordinary efficiency on luggage boys, and we were installed on the wicker seats of our carriage, our luggage safely stowed, in time that would have done credit to Euston. A moment before the train started its long journey, Don Federico appeared at our window for a last word of farewell, and as the train crawled from the station, belching showers of wood sparks, we watched his short thick-set, bent figure ploughing a way through the native throng. May his memory of us be as pleasant as ours of him.

It seemed rather strange that since a reserved compartment was such an essential, Roberto had not taken one.

“ It's like this, ol' man,” he roared. “ Manager's a damn fine fellow. . . . Er-mmm—we had a little tiff——”

We had heard vague rumours of this “ little tiff.” Roberto had first come out to Paraguay to take a job on the railway. He had stayed some time with the railway manager and a row had ended the venture.

We could well imagine the bluff good fellowship of Roberto becoming a trifle boring, but he was so easily managed and so anxious to please that he intrigued us.

Roberto grew heartily reminiscent. “ I broke his ribs you know,” he barked.

“ You *what?* ”

"Smashed up his ribs," said Roberto laconically. "Just a friendly little wrestle, that's all," he added casually. "Said he liked wrestling—broke his ribs——"

"Well, it might make a man annoyed," I ventured.

"No," blared Roberto airily. "Not a bit. I offered to pay for the doctor. I think that riled him——"

This young Roberto had a way of saying the simplest things that made us laugh. He was a great, hearty, good-natured clown, and as the landscape of Paraguay slipped by we grew really fond of him.

Within a few hours we realized it would have been a ghastly journey without him. As the sun crept higher in the changeless blue curtain of the sky the heat in the train became terrific.

A succession of thugs paraded the corridors, one with his face and hands laced with scars, and with a sharp leering face we did not like at all. He had clearly been in dozens of knife fights and wanted some more. A continuous stream of thick dust enveloped the train and defied all our efforts to keep it out. Beads of sweat traced rivulets through the dusty masks that caked our faces.

Nevertheless we were glad to take this journey from one side of Paraguay to the other. It gave us an opportunity of seeing the nature of the whole country. A chain of hills ridges the land; and from Asuncion to Villa Rica hills stood up suddenly in the midst of the plains like islands in the sea. Sometimes a huge perfectly-formed mound rose a thousand feet above the bare earth.

Cattle of rather better quality than those in the Chaco grazed on the parched grass of the plains, and Roberto presently began to talk of his work.

His league of camp was more than halfway across Paraguay, and he was much interested in the job of breeding some decent stock. So far he seemed not to have made any money at it, but at least he was happy.

"It's a good life. Don't really know why I ever go down to Asuncion.—Nothin' doin' there. This time different,

meeting you folks and Chris," he conceded. "Usually nothin'. I said to Willie last trip (Y'know, young Hayward—he's my agent), 'Willie, Asuncion's no good; a fellow goes down on the International for a day or so with 50,000 notes and comes back with *what!*'" He had worked up to a crescendo and ended in a telling pause. "What?" we said anxiously.

Roberto's large hands fell to his knees.

"Nothing," he roared—and, not wishing to appear guilty of exaggeration, qualified—"I mean to say, next to nothing. Piece of ham, maybe, or a jar of chutney." He sighed and shrugged. It represented a real problem. "I mean," he said, earnestly, "that's not much to show for 50,000 notes. Nothin' to show for it. That's the point."

But he had learned the value of money. He told us so. At each small station he insisted on doing the buying because he said the women would "sting" us.

Pat was in the act of buying a good pineapple for six pesos* but Roberto checked her eagerly, roaring his anger at the placid market woman. "Impossible price! Three pesos is all they're worth. You mustn't pay their price, señora," he chided.

The woman walked away. Pat wanted a pineapple—even at twenty pesos. "She'll come back," said Roberto confidently. "They always come back."

But she didn't and Pat was done out of her pineapple.

At every stopping-place the market women swarmed by the side of the train, bearing on their heads baskets laden with fruit and cakes. Oranges, mandarins, pineapples, cakes, sweets, and the rings of chipa flowed beneath our windows.

Roberto advised us to try chipa and bought four loaves. It was sustaining, he said. It was. Between us we only managed to nibble about a third of one of the thick sticky loaves. It was like eating soft lead and became lead in the stomach.

By the time we had crawled at less than five miles an hour

*Just under 10.

across the rickety bridge over the Tebicuary river we wanted only to sleep, but sleep was impossible in the dust-rimed oven our carriage had become. Even Roberto's conversation bubbled desultorily.

The line from Asuncion to Villa Rica is still in parts the original track built to the order of Lopez, and most travellers feel happier when the old wooden bridges are safely crossed. The last half of the line to Encarnacion is comparatively recent, and the bridge over the Pirapo river is an imposing affair of steel girders, on which our train lingered for a full twenty minutes as though to make sure we should be impressed.

It was late afternoon when the train crawled slowly across a new type of country. Ant heaps three feet high knobbled the plains so close together it would have been difficult to thread a way between them on foot.

"Rotten country," said Roberto. "Can't ride a horse over it. There's a bit of it in my camp."

It seemed to me utterly useless. Even if cattle could find feed they would be likely to break their legs, and it would be impossible to muster them.

Our stops grew longer. Pigs, sheep, goats and dogs wandered underneath the train searching for bits. We presented a sow and her litter with some of our excess store of chipa. Pat wanted me to stow a piece in our luggage and take it home, but I didn't think it would mix well with the dead frog, the toucan's head, the snake skins and other odds and ends we were already carrying.

It was dusk before Roberto left us. We watched him walking up the slight mound of a hill on which his small white house was set. Once he turned and waved.

The train had emptied. The thugs were no longer prowling in the corridors. We risked leaving our carriage and searched for the buffet car. It was deserted, its tables thick with dust. We ordered tea, two eggs each, bread and butter, and a packet of cigarettes, and were charged 9d. Everything on the train

was as cheap as dirt and very nearly made of dirt. Slowly the hours dragged on. Two men seemed to have chosen the lavatory as a chatting place. It was filthy anyway. We were tired out. Our eyes were bunged up. We ached, and lolled listlessly on our wicker seats.

The night was moonless and we were grateful for the bush fires that gave some form to the darkness. Flames licked up the dry grass of the plains to the edge of the track. Lines of red flickering tongues of flame ate up the blackness of the night and crawled over the horizons like vast flaming band saws. Puffs of choking smoke made our eyes smart and added to our miseries. It was half-past nine before we saw the lights of Encarnacion and welcomed them joyfully.

"Hot baths and bed, old girl," I promised.

"Bath and bed's about all I'm good for," sighed Pat, wiping the dust from her lips.

It was ten o'clock when we crawled into Encarnacion. Two minutes later, our luggage balancing dangerously on the footboards of an ancient taxi, our suit-cases piled fore and aft, we jolted over the pot-holed streets of the city towards the hotel of Herr Schultz, blessing his name, for to us it meant rest.

V. FAREWELL TO PARAGUAY

By midnight we had almost forgotten our longings for sleep and hot baths. The only sort of bath we might have would be a ducking in the cold waters of the Alto Parana, and the urge to sleep had left us. We had become accustomed even to our coatings of dust.

The hotel of Herr Schultz—if ever you should find yourself in Villa Encarnacion (and I can't think why you should, except that the White Russian colony at Hohenau is worth a visit, and Jesuit ruins abound)—is the best place to stay. You will have a clean bed and will not be cheated.

But that is only hearsay. We were not fortunate enough to check up. The hotel was rather more than full. "It is

always advisable to send a *telegrafo*," Herr Schultz told us, and then with a shrug of heavy shoulders: "Doubtless you would arrive ahead of it."

We at least took advantage of Herr Schultz' washing and other arrangements, while our taxi waited on the dusty track that had led us to the hotel. We refreshed ourselves with insipid *cerveza blanca* while craving hot tea, and looked over the water to the lights of Posadas. There was not a Mihanovich sailing for three days to Brazil and Iguazu, our host assured us, so time was not a factor.

We tried six more hotels, two of them brothels. But we should not have minded. Even (or perhaps especially; I'm not an expert) a brothel bedroom might have a key. At last our patient taxi driver shrugged his shoulders: "Que lastima! The señora must be tired. . . . There is a place, but I think you cannot take your señora there." I thought so too.

We stopped the engine. There was no hurry and I wanted to think. The lights of Posadas twinkled annoyingly less than two miles distant.

"We will go to Posadas," I said.

"There is no launch," advised the driver sadly.

"Nevertheless we will go," I said.

I had suddenly remembered that we were still in Paraguay; that I was the President's friend; the foreign minister's friend; that my pockets bulged with passes to go all over the shop; to prison camps, barrack rooms, hospitals, arsenals.

The engine started. We drove unhopelessly to the offices of the Commandante on the river front. A sentry challenged us.

"Corresponsal especial del Morning Post de Londres!" I barked with a flourish. (Roberto would have sat up.)

It had no meaning for the sentry, and gave him nothing to say. It sounded too darned special.

We waited in an ante-chamber while the sentry conveyed this information as best he could to his superior. We were shown in. A slim young man with a lean brown face sat at a large table desk. He was obviously tired, irritable, and

prepared to be terse. I lushed him with courtesy and regrets. He smiled. He rose.

"Señor, forgive me—you are the image of my brother. *Bien parecido!*" His liquid brown eyes glowed. "You have been in the Chaco? You have seen him perhaps?"

In a moment we were drawing diagrams of Irendegua, of Carandaytay, of the Paraguayan position before Villa Montes.

"You were in Concepcion not a week ago? How wonderful is transport!"

We had our own ideas about that, but kept them. To the young Commandante Concepcion was at the ends of the earth. We were going on through Brazil, we told him. And that was another end of the earth. And Bolivia . . . that was hell itself.

He was suitably astonished at this itinerary and was delighted that I should say I was going to Bolivia. He conceived it as a compliment to his good sense that I should tell him so, but I knew he would soon find out from my passport. It was well that I resembled his brother so closely.

Time passed, but time didn't matter. At last I said: "We should like to cross to Posadas . . . to-night."

He barked a command. The sentry appeared. Saluted.

"Take these documents to the Chief of Police with my compliments. He will affix his seal." The sentry's heels clicked.

"And money?" I asked. "Can you change me some money?"

Another sentry appeared.

"Bring a hundred pesos Argentine. That will suffice señor?"

Heels clicked. It was almost as if we rubbed Aladdin's lamp. I thanked God I was like his brother. But we were not out of the wood.

"A launch?" I ventured.

The Commandante scratched his chin.

"There is no launch. . . . There *is* a launch for one hundred

passengers. . . . It is in midstream. . . . Carlos sleeps aboard. . . . The *muelle* is long——”

As these ruminations developed he shouted yet again for a sentry.

“Go,” he commanded, “to the end of the *muelle*, and shout until Carlos awakes.”

Heels clicked.

“Carlos will be angry, señor,” he explained. “You will deal with him, señor. He will want to charge you a great deal—as if you were fifty passengers, say——”

I bowed.

Presently our papers and money arrived. We signed some forms. We exchanged good wishes and many courtesies. The Commandante escorted us to the river’s edge and directed our patient taximan to the end of the mole a hundred metres on. We walked slowly in the taxi’s wake, our minds blurred with tiredness and faint amusement.

Two soldiers handled our luggage. I felt in my pockets for Paraguayan money and found a \$200 note.

“Oh, hell,” I said. “I should have left myself more. This won’t be half enough.”

I put the \$200 Paraguayan into the taximan’s hand and began to unpeel my new roll of Argentine, adjusting my reckonings to the new currency, and realizing the \$100 was now worth a good £5 and not just a tip for a crossing-sweeper.

“But, señor,” said the taximan. “This is too much, and I have not change.”

“Too much! but you have been with us fully four hours. It is not enough.”

“Señor, it is too much. I cannot take it. The launch will prove costly.”

I was astonished. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. With difficulty I persuaded him to keep the note. He would not take more. In actual fact \$200 is worth at least a pound in Paraguay, although scarcely two shillings in England.

We walked the frayed boards of the long mole out over the river. The voices of the sentries came vaguely to us. The sky was hard and bright with stars. It was cold. The river was a mirror of black marble, full of light. A mile over the water the lights of Posadas twinkled, and bathed themselves in the water's edge. At intervals the soldiers shouted:

"Carlos! La lancha—hay pasajeros. Venga pronto!"

The shouts rippled over the water and were lost. There was no answering sound. The soldiers stood broad and comfortable in their heavy great coats. We shivered; Pat in silk stockings and a light coat that had seemed as heavy as a bear skin a few hours earlier.

So we stood, waiting, between two countries, a river beneath us, lapping black and shiny through the chinks of the boards; soldiers, growing restive, losing their humour in the situation. Presently a new day would be born. It was somehow impressive. We felt then, and we feel now, that we shall remember those lengthening minutes on the end of the long *muelle* at Villa Encarnacion when much else has been forgotten. It was like a pause in flight. Everything seemed to have paused, while our senses quickened, and we absorbed this small piece of life. So that at any time, a slight noise, a movement, a vague cold aroma of river, more than night itself, takes us back to the end of the mole, the last point of the last continent.

At last a sound came to us, seeming near at hand. It was a muffled grunt. It became an oath. A preliminary splutter of an engine followed.

"*Ya viene*," sighed one of the soldiers, and immediately relaxed.

After two or three false starts the engine burst to life, and a large launch separated itself from the gloom.

"Carlos, pasajeros—muy importante!" advised a sentry.

But Carlos was an Argentine and did not care. He worked out importance in Paraguay as if it was the rate of exchange.

"Cincuenta pesos," he said.

Two pounds ten; a month's living. It was my first real intimation that life was about to prove expensive again. I pretended to misunderstand.

"But that is too little," I said quietly. "Simply because we have been the guests of Paraguay we cannot be yours."

"Argentine!" grunted Carlos slowly, but I could hear that he was shaken.

I laughed, and helped Pat into the boat.

"We will arrange it as we cross . . . we shall agree."

Carlos grunted again uncompromisingly. I had to take a chance. So did Carlos. The soldiers would not let him hang around haggling at the end of the mole. We chugged out into the stream, Carlos grunting angrily, and beginning to get wordy. Pat, I knew, was hanging on to things with an effort. She was dead beat and badly in need of rest. Fever was not far away from her. Also the transactions between Carlos and me seemed dangerous to her. It is always worst for the onlooker.

But Carlos responded. He told me about his mother; his little son. He charged ten pesos, not fifty. He carried our luggage up onto the Posadas wharf.

"Why are they like that with you?" said Pat.

"I don't know," I said. "But we're not out of the wood yet."

An Argentine sailor glanced irritably at our bags.

"What have you there? who are you? You can't come into Argentine to-night." His eyes were small black points. Only an Argentine sailor knows how to look officious all over. Even his boots look officious.

The launch was already almost inseparable from the night and the black glimmering river. A pin point of light showed the end of the mole on which we had stood.

"Neither can we return," I said. I was tired out and was getting irritable. Argentine sailors always have this effect on me. I did not propose to argue; or to say anything more. He could work it out for himself. We had no letters from the President now—no passes—we were in another country.

CHAPTER XIII

POSADAS

Two hours of the new day had passed when we at last disentangled ourselves from the sailor. It seemed he rarely enjoyed the privileges of a customs' officer, and he made the most of the opportunity. A group of loungers shook off the stupor that had appeared to hold them and formed an appreciative audience. It was clear that we should only get away from this petty tyrant swiftly by a large donation. I had not a large donation. Even if I had, natural inquisitiveness might have led this man to pursue his search. In the end it was largely due to the hoboës that we got away.

Towards the end of the rummaging, the sentry let out a triumphant chuckle and pounced on a parcel that had been hastily wrapped in a sheet of newspaper.

"Ha—and this, what is this, señor?"

"That," I said casually. "Oh, that is a frog; a dead frog."

The man's fat hands juggled with the parcel as though he had been bitten.

"Careful!" I admonished.

"A frog indeed!" croaked the sailor doubtingly, recovering himself. I undid the wrappings. The frog was ten inches long, six inches broad, and stood at least four inches high. Its eyes were large and glassy. I thrust the thing sharply towards him.

"A frog you see; quite dead—stuffed in fact."

The sailor jumped back. The hoboës found some laughter in their palsied systems and let it loose.

We packed up our luggage and awakened the driver of a car near the wharf.

We did not know the name of a hotel in Posadas.

"Any place with a bed," I said.

The roads were an improvement on Encarnacion. In a few minutes we drew up with a jolt outside a flat-fronted building with lights showing through the window grilles. A pianola was galloping somewhere within.

"*Hay pasajeros!*" yelled our driver without leaving his seat.

A middle-aged German in his shirt sleeves appeared. "Pasajeros?" he asked, and seeing us crawling over a heap of luggage—"Welcome, señores—welcome."

He had a small bristly moustache jutting from his onion-like face. He was thin, except that from his middle a large belly bulged like a pumpkin. It had the look of being hooked on like a big drum.

We followed him into a stone hall. A pianola raced furiously and a few voices burst in here and there.

"We should like a bath," I said humorously.

"Ah, señor—*Qué lastima!*—only yesterday the hot water went away! How long are you here?"

"One day—two, maybe."

"What an ill chance, señor. In three days, they promise, the hot water returns."

"It doesn't matter," I said.

He showed us to our room; gave us a sharp stiff-necked bow and left us. We looked round. We were in a dormitory. Thin boards halfway to the ceiling separated us from a variety of masculine and feminine snores. From the high ceiling hung a single lamp, casting light over the dormitory. There were four beds; one in each corner against the matchboarding. We chose a bed. Within an inch or two various noises were going on through the partition. We chose another bed. A lady with a snuffle was our neighbour. We judged her to be in a different cubicle from the bed noises. Two or three partitions away a baby made slight fretful sounds. The pianola blared fitfully; glasses clinked.

But we slept.

Wandering out into the hall about ten o'clock the next morning, while making a preliminary survey of the hotel, I met the host, beaming behind his belly.

We paused in polite conversation.

"We sail on the 'Mihanovitch' for Iguazu," I said casually.

"The 'Mihanovich'!" exclaimed the little German. "It sailed an hour ago. There isn't another for more than a week."

I laughed. I laughed the whole night's story right off my chest. All our rushing round Encarnacion had been unnecessary. If those damned fools had told us the boat was sailing we could have crossed the river and slept aboard in luxury. By now we should have been zigzagging delightfully towards the end of the Alto Parana.

Now, we had a whole week in Posadas with our meagre finances dwindling.

We breakfasted on a vast variety of sausage. The German hid his stomach behind the bar and assured us that we should be comfortable. I did not wish to seem fussy, but I am not a lover of mixed public sleeping. A certain degree of seclusion is desirable. I conveyed these sentiments without offence.

He had a quiet room, he assured us, opening into a pleasant patio, with an old well, amidst brilliant flowering shrubs. There would be a small extra charge.

This would not set us back more than £2 in a week, and considering we were in Argentine it was very cheap.

By the time we had settled into our new room we were glad we had missed the boat. It was good to be incognito. Not a soul knew where we were, and all at once we felt the relief of being by ourselves. We had no social duties, no introductions, no knowledge whatever of this remote Argentine town.

We wandered lazily in the neat streets and sunned ourselves on the broad stone pavements of the central plaza. The contrast with Paraguay was very marked; the roads were of

stone and comparatively well kept; the shrubs and the trees of the plaza seemed happy to be alive; the pathways were neat. Policemen in new brown uniforms, with gleaming swords and large revolvers, stood at cross-roads swinging their batons and eyed us officiously. All Argentine minor officials have a fat-faced aggressive look, and a horrible complacency. Only Englishmen make good public servants. It is a job needing considerable nobility of character.

We drank rich coffee and ate succulent small cakes at a pavement café, while small negroes, like little black "buttons," and negro-Indian gamins, contested the honour of shining our shoes. Even here, in this ultimate Argentine Province of Misiones, there was an air of wealth. Several fine buildings with striped awnings sheltering their windows, stood around the *Plaza 9 de Julio* and an imposing Cathedral rose high above the tall palms facing us as we sat and sipped our coffee.

For two days it was a quiet rest for us to wander around the town just liking people and things. Down on the river front we discovered a small market set like a nest in a huge cavity denting the high cliffs. But we missed the open friendliness we had found everywhere in Paraguay—these Argentines were too conscious of themselves.

In the cool evenings we sat out on the plaza, drinking *San Martins*; nibbling at profusions of nuts and olives, while dark-faced boys and girls paraded the stone walks. It was luxury to us after the poverty of Paraguay. Even the very German and sausagey food in our hotel gave us a new interest in our meals. But money was once again money. It was "unavoidable delays" like this that I had to guard against. On the second night, as we played escoba together while the pianola blared in the hall, I grew restless.

"I think we'll be moving, old girl," I said. "We can't wait for the next boat. There'll be a cargo launch."

The next morning I arranged for us to travel by the "Doli"—a small launch carrying *yerba* sacks and other cargo to the

dozens of small river ports over the three or four hundred miles between Posadas and Mendez in Brazil.

The "Doli" is a rough launch, they warned me. "You have your señora. It is unsuitable."

"We shall enjoy it. My señora has been in the Gran Chaco," I said proudly.

And I thought, as I had often thought before, how hellish it must be to be married to an author, and what a wonder Pat was not to complain.

On the last night we came out of our incognito and dined with the manager of the Bank of London and his attractive Paraguayan wife in the Plaza Hotel.

Midway through dinner the bank manager said suddenly: "But when did you arrive? Where are you staying?"

We told him.

"But this is the only place to stay. You must move in here. You can't live in a *boliche*!"

"But we like it," said Pat. "Besides we are sailing in the morning for Iguazu."

"Iguazu—impossible. There isn't a boat," said the manager. "Better come along here. We'll go out to San Ignacio to-morrow."

"We'd love to, on the way back," I said. "We're leaving by cargo launch at six in the morning."

They engulfed us with persuasion. Had we any idea of the hardships? Had we thought of the essential crudities? I could not take my wife in a cargo launch!—It amazes a South American that a woman can make herself a good companion or be fit for anything other than breeding.

"No," we said, amused. "We hadn't thought of things like that."

They did not believe we were going, and we did not try hard to convince them. When we said good-bye and left at midnight for our *boliche* they thought we were mad.

CHAPTER XIV

IGUAZU

I. FOUR HUNDRED MILES IN A CARGO LAUNCH

WE left most of our luggage at the Mihanovich office in Posadas and boarded the "Doli" with a suit-case each. A huge rakish man in greasy *bombachas* and an equally greasy singlet stood with arms akimbo and legs astride at the rail amidships. He had the broadest shoulders I have ever seen on a man, with knobs of muscle the size of oranges. His face grinned hugely and had the naivety of a child.

"Bueñas, señor!" he grinned.

"Bueñas, Captain," I said as I introduced Pat. His answering grin was sudden and surprised.

We went aboard and sat on some bales astern while the crowd of workers and loungers on the wharf eyed us passively. A white mist was swathing the river in soft folds, dispersing slowly in the light wind. Posadas seemed all cream and gold in the early sun.

"This is going to be grand fun," I said. "What a bit of luck we missed the boat."

A middle-aged man in dirty white dungarees approached bashfully. He was clearly a grade or two above the huge-shouldered man I had taken for the Captain.

"That large bloke must have been pleased!" Pat observed. I introduced this new captain.

Half an hour later I had introduced five captains, two sailors, the engineer, the commissario, and finally the real Captain.

The Captain might have been an English cargo skipper. He was an Argentine and had not even travelled beyond Corrientes, but he had an alert, weather-beaten look and the easy rolling gait of the born seaman. He was curt without

being casual, and it was somewhat surprising to hear Spanish from his lips. We felt happy with him.

For two hours loading continued, and to our surprise the passenger list increased. A young Paraguayan was going up to Bemberg, within a few miles of the Brazilian border. There had been a bumper crop of yerba up there, he told us, and men were in demand.

Hundreds of thousands of acres of Misiones are given over to the cultivation of yerba maté. "But of course, señor," said the young Paraguayan respectfully, "it is not like our yerba. We have the *natural* yerbales."

"And I have ten kilos of it in my trunk," I said. "In England we can only buy dreadful stuff, and it costs a fortune."

The young man was shocked, visualizing a world without yerba, which to the Paraguayan is worse than a world without women.

A plump and genial German in his fifties bustled aboard, nodding his grey bullet head in all directions. The young Paraguayan edged away unhappily. The German beamed on us and uttered some words in an unintelligible language. We returned the smile and looked puzzled.

"No unerstan'—nein—si?" he gabbled.

"Nein." I said firmly. I always admire people who cannot put a sentence together yet manage to speak to all and sundry without looking foolish.

He was a jovial chap. His podgy legs stretched his trousers taut as he sat beside us. "I spik China," he advised hopefully. I shook my head. "China nein."

Nevertheless he made us understand he was bound for Puerto Rico, to buy timber, and that we should be there before nightfall.

By 8 a.m. the mist had lifted and the cargo was aboard; our engines chugged, and we were away, rocking out into the fast running stream, the suburbs of Posadas stringing out over the high cliffs behind us.

On our left lay Villa *Encarnacion*, and the low bank of the Paraguayan shore. The *niebla* still hung in faint shrouds over the rushing waters and the sun had still to take the last of the chill from the air. Within half an hour all signs of civilization had vanished. The tall *tacuara* ferns, their stalks as thick as big bamboos, and thirty feet high, crowded to the water's edge on the Argentine bank, forming an impenetrable mask. The low lying Paraguayan coast was for a time more restful to our eyes, but presently the *tacuara* gave way to rocky cliffs, towering more than a hundred feet above us, and thick with palms and stunted trees, their roots twisting in snake-like masses.

Halfway through the morning a sailor brought us black coffee and dry bread. There was no butter and no milk, and the Skipper came over to us with a worried expression. "The manager only advised me of your coming last night. We have done our best for you. We are not a ship for passengers."

We assured him we were pleased to be sailing with him.

"You will find many inconveniences," he apologized doubtfully, unable to understand how anyone could suffer discomfort willingly.

We noticed as we drank our coffee that the Skipper and *commisario* cast occasional glances in our direction, and shrugged. We were friends of the President of the company, they knew, and, of course, quite mad. (Not because we were friends of the President but because we held first-class tickets on the luxurious motor vessel "Guayra.")

Not until lunch time did we realize the extent of the Captain's last-minute efforts for our comfort and conceit. There was a good-sized saloon amidships with a narrow table running almost the length of it. The *commissario*, a vain young man with a smirk on his face and pomposity in every line of his soon-to-be-fat body, escorted us below. The German and the Paraguayan youth were already seated opposite each other across a strip of blue check tablecloth. A foot

higher up the table was a strip of white tablecloth; and here we sat. The German and the young Paraguayan held their eyes decorously to their own share of the table. Pat and I exchanged glances, cleared our throats, controlled our laughter and addressed the "third class" casually.

"We should be at San Ignacio soon after lunch," I said.

We followed this friendly overture by sharing our cruet with the "third class," somewhat to the annoyance of the commissario, who peered at us occasionally from the short companion. What was the use of having a 1st and 3rd if we did not observe the distinction? The cruet had been a special symbol. A cruet, we learned afterwards, had never before been seen or heard of aboard the "Doli." It had been a brilliant thought of the commissario's. And we so far forgot our "places" as to share it! But there were other subtle distinctions to follow.

We all began with soup, thick with *fideo*. Several slices of garlic sausage followed for us, but for our third-class neighbours there was a succulent-looking mass of *puchero*.

We caught sidelong triumphant glances from the German, but no sooner had we finished than good helpings of *puchero* reached us, and the third-class had garlic sausage. At this point laughter got the better of us all. The barriers collapsed. The commissario hearing our laughter clumped down the companionway from the deck, gave us an injured look, saw that the damage was irreparable and, with a shrug, left us to it.

So the meal progressed. We all ate the same foods but in a different order, and the commissario kept up the "1st and 3rd" rigidly while our fellow-passengers remained.

About three o'clock in the afternoon we tied up at San Ignacio, our first port of call, and unloaded yerba sacks until the rim of the sun rested on the tree tops of Paraguay.

All through the afternoon we had lolled lazily on coils of four-inch rope aft, sucking oranges given us by the Captain, and watching the plump commissario sweat as he kept tally

of the cargo. Our three sailors, stripped to the waist, worked without pause or complaint. They laughed and joked continuously, and waved to us whenever they caught our eyes. The broad-shouldered child-like sailor was proud of his introduction to the "fair señora," and appeared to fall over himself to get out of Pat's way whenever she got in his.

Meanwhile the German, whose humour had been benevolent after lunch, grew agitated as the day wore on and we made no move from San Ignacio.

At eight, we understood him to say (after much pantomime) his friend would be waiting at Puerto Rico. What should he do?

We explained that there was no problem. The friend, knowing the country, would, of course, wait.

It was nearly seven by the time we cast loose and chugged once more into the stream.

The skipper came aft to see how we were getting on. We were all thawing. The engineer wandered our way frequently; the commissario, free of his arduous tally duties, sat down on the saloon ventilator and chatted.

"When shall we arrive at Puerto Rico?" I asked the Captain. "This gentleman is anxious." The Captain shrugged. "Midnight, maybe. In the morning, maybe. Quien sabe?"

"Do we keep going through the night?"

"It depends on the *niebla*. It is often very thick. Sometimes it descends early. Sometimes late. We keep going as long as we can."

I conveyed all this to the German and his face went as troubled as a child's. He said: "Spik China, no?" and there was anguish in his voice. He wanted, desperately, to speak and there was no one to understand him. As we chugged over the black racing water and the tacuara ferns and the *montes* made dark leafy walls to the star-filled sky, his voice raced on, answered only by sympathetic sounds from Pat, who knows how to listen to people talking in any language and give them the impression she understands.

"I know what he's talking about," she said. "He's only grumbling about this damned launch and his friend at Puerto Rico. It does him good to get it all out."

An hour after dark we nosed into a small wharf at a place called San Pipo, where the sailors unloaded a few bales of yerba sacks and toiled with them up the steep bank, falling and cursing frequently in the darkness. Before they had finished the white mist had begun to creep over the black surface of the river swelling up in puffs around us. The skipper and I were standing with our backs against the warm walls of the engine-room house.

"We'll stay here to-night," he said. "We shouldn't get far in this. The rocks are dangerous."

As soon as we had finished supper the young Paraguayan and the German wrapped themselves in blankets and curled up on the wooden seats round the sides of the saloon. We were playing *escoba* by the light of the oil lamp when the skipper wandered in.

"You play *escoba*?" he said, surprised.

"Truco we like best," I answered.

His face stiffened with amazement.

"*Truco! La señora sabe truco!* Impossible——"

"She plays quite well, señor capitán."

In a moment he had leapt up the companion to the deck, and we heard him explaining breathlessly to the unbelieving commissario.

Five minutes later, to the mournful hum of the lightly snoring sleepers, the four of us sat at truco.

"If you will confine your remarks to simple Spanish, señores," I said. "My señora will play better."

Pat was necessarily my partner and for three hours we nearly held our own. At last Captain and commissario rose and bowed.

"Señora, we are astounded," they said earnestly. "It is remarkable that your husband plays—but an English señora . . . it is a great honour."

"My wife learned to play in the Gran Chaco," I said, and their eyes widened in astonishment.

"It is wonderful," they breathed. They meant that she was wonderful.

We had a small cabin, like a cupboard, opening into the saloon. It was impossible to sleep with the door shut. The skipper and commissario lay wrapped in blankets on the saloon seats and soon we were all asleep.

At five I went on deck and lowered a bucket over the side. The water was icy and the mist was still as thick as cotton wool. It was half-past eight before we sailed and zigzagged cautiously upstream. Occasionally we ran into clear sunshine and enjoyed a minute's warmth before being immersed again in the clammy mist. But within an hour the *niebla* had cleared completely and the water shone like diamonds. For the first time in all the hundreds of miles we had travelled by river a real change showed in this vast Alto Parana. Narrow folds of waters ran in torrents marking the rock channels, and swift whirlpools rocked the launch awkwardly, giving it swift and sudden twists.

It was a grand day. At half a dozen small ports we unloaded yerba sacks, our three sailors working with amazing zest and gaiety. Life seemed a constant source of joy to them.

Each ten or twelve miles the virgin forest of the Misiones coast broke into slight clearings, and the broad drooping blades of banana leaves spread over the rocky slopes of the river banks, massing dark green against the blue of the sky. Amongst them there would be a small mud hut or tin-roofed shed, with rough steps cut in the cliffs leading up to it. Usually these steps would be banistered with the long *tacuara* stems, indistinguishable from bamboos. Usually, too, there was a sign, roughly painted, on the roof of the shanty—Puerto Gisella or Puerto Mineral—and the German compared these names anxiously with the map he carried, trying to estimate when we might arrive at Puerto Rico.

We lay out in midstream opposite these "one-man-ports," and dropped a dinghy laden with the empty yerba sacks for the crops. The commissario stood grandly on top of the sacks while the sailors drove the dinghy swiftly to shore with dexterous sweeps of the long oars. Two of the sailors stood forward using the oars as paddles, while the huge grinning fellow with the mighty shoulders used his oar as a sweep from the stern. Always, as soon as the commissario and one sailor had climbed aboard on the return trip, the launch got under way, and the sailors took it in turns to surf ride the dinghy as it rocked a few feet astern in our wash.

On a small strip of beach at the foot of a clearing a family of Indians signed frantically for us to stop. They had been waiting all night and day with their household goods around them; two small trestle beds, various bundles, two little girls aged about five and six, two dogs, two cats and various other live stock. We stopped and sent the dinghy to bring them aboard.

"We want to go to Bemberg. There's a great crop of yerba. There's work for cutters," they called from the dinghy.

The Captain signified that that was all very well if they had money for their fares. They had.

The father of the family had his brother with him, and this man, dressed in his best for the occasion, was the queerest oddity we had yet seen in South America. His loose, flowing *bombachas* with wide black and white stripes and his pink shirt and black beret would have raised yells in a circus. Both men were intensely self-conscious, and nervous of the trip they were about to make, and there was some argument between them and the woman about leaving some of the live stock behind. They decided to leave one dog and one cat ashore.

"They'll be all right," said the Captain. "We can't wait all night."

The dog made frantic efforts to board the dinghy when it

made a second trip for the beds and bundles, and swam out more than fifty yards before turning back for the shore, where the cat had remained with her head on her paws lazily watching.

There was a growing thrill for us in the narrowing river. The banks reared higher and more rocky, and presently were towering more than a hundred feet above us. Small tongues of golden sand pushed out into the river that had now become as clear as crystal. Butterflies fluttered and glittered around us like jewels, and there was a wide stretch of beach the colour of primroses.

The commissario, sitting beside us, said casually: "*Mari-posas*—thick as flies."

As we passed the brilliant primrose stretch our wash lapped over it and at once the air was a mass of yellow, fluttering wings. We had not imagined that butterflies could ever be in such profusion and that the earth could be carpeted with their brilliant wings.

The commissario watched us enviously. "I wish *I* could see Iguazu," he said. "We go so near but never get there. It is more wonderful than anything in the world. And the mariposas . . . ! These yellow things are trash. At Iguazu they are all colours of the rainbow——" He made forlorn gestures with his pudgy hands, his shoulders heaving and his soft spaniel-like eyes rolling.

The world was a fairyland. Time had ceased to matter. We were going to see the birth of a river that runs for fifteen hundred miles to the sea without a lock and scarcely a cataract. There was a beauty and a wildness that we had not known before in South America. A hundred yards inshore a man would be lost. We looked at the wild tangle of undergrowth and vines, skeining the twisted trees, and imagined it going on and on for hundreds of miles, unexplored, unbroken. . . . Trees—trees—trees. And to-morrow we should be on the edge of Matto Grasso——"

It does not sound very exciting, but to us it meant striding

on the rim of a new world; a world of unbroken forest the size of India as far as the Himalayas.

Some day a man will start from Minas Geraes and walk through uncharted jungle to Bogota. And that man will have done something almost as wonderful as Tschiffely's ride.

Contemplating these things as the 'Doli' dodged the shelves of black rock jutting out into the Alto Parana, I thought that in South America I would find my future. I remember saying to Pat as we watched the butterflies dancing, blue, gold, crimson and purple over the clear sparkling water:

"This is the land for me, old lady. It's endless. It goes on and on. We'll learn it. We'll make it our life. Nobody knows much about it. . . . It is the Land of the Future. It must be."

Late in the afternoon we dropped the agitated German at Puerto Rico; and just as it was dusk we saw the funicular running up the steep banks of El Dorado to the roof of Misiones. We had glimpsed the neat green yerba trees through breaks in the forest as we approached, and the Captain had increased our interest in this thriving German colony and the almost legendary figure, Schwelm, who was its king.

Thanks to the manager of the Paraguayan railway I had learned a good deal about these colonies and I was determined to see something of El Dorado on the way back.

The moon was still young and was setting early, but we kept going slowly for an hour in the pitch blackness, until we found a place where we could push our nose well up into a sandbank and make fast for the night. The *niebla* was settling and it was best to stop while we could see what we were doing. It might not be easy to find such a place later, and it would be dangerous in midstream.

The Indian family and all their livestock were squatting cowlike and silent in the saloon, watching us languidly as we ate our supper with the Paraguayan boy next us.

Presently there was a muffled quacking; a bundle of blan-

kets grew animated; one of the little girls clutched at them and let out a cry. A moment later two ducks were running around the saloon pecking at crumbs and trying to get on the table.

The small girls dragged loose from their mother's hands and grovelled to retrieve the ducks. The faces of the Indians had become nervous masks. I caught the dark, sombre eyes of the father and smiled. His face spread into a grin of relief. His wife smiled. The brother in the terrible *bombachas* smiled. And in a moment we were all laughing.

The saloon was a dormitory that night. The Indian woman and her daughters slept in a kind of bundle with their ducks. The men slept end to end along the wooden seat next them; and the young Paraguayan had moved to the opposite side, with the skipper and commissario.

There was a good "fug" working up; body smells and warmth comforting the saloon against the bitterness of the night's cold. We all crept into our blankets and slept.

The mist had fallen away by seven in the morning, and we made good progress although at times it was necessary to twist and turn almost at right angles to avoid the ridges of rock that thrust out into mid-stream.

All the morning we talked to the Indians, taking maté as we sat on the soft yerba sacks forward. By midday we arrived at Bemberg and the launch was suddenly empty and silent.

"It's good to be alone," said the Skipper. "Do you feel like truco this afternoon?"

So we played, laughing and joking, and with occasional breaks to talk of other things.

"We shall be sorry to lose you," the Captain said simply. "Perhaps you will return with us?"

"We should like to, but how shall we know when you are ready?" There was little chance of making the return trip on the "Doli," but we promised to do our best.

At dusk the Skipper said we should reach Puerto Aguirre

that night if the mist held off for another three hours. The night was hard and clear and there was no sign of the *niebla* forming. Pat turned in for a few hours' sleep. We might have another night in the open when we landed. Aguirre is only a border outpost, and the falls, we knew, were some miles distant.

The commissario and I sat in the saloon playing *truco*, *mano á mano*.

"The Captain and I will be truly sorry to lose you and your señora," he said. "We shall always remember this voyage."

"And so shall we," I promised. "We are very glad of the chance that led us to the 'Doli.'"

We played silently, without great heart, and awakened Pat at eight for black coffee and a slice of garlic sausage. A few moments later the Skipper called from the top of the companion:

"Señores—come!"

We climbed to the deck and stared ahead at the black racing water.

"See—straight ahead—a tiny light."

A minute yellow flicker was barely visible, suspended in a black formless void between earth and sky.

"That is Aguirre, where three countries meet," said the Skipper.

And for an hour, resting our backs against the warm walls of the engine room, we watched the small light grow until we could see the loom of Matto Grasso, in Brazil, and on our left the ultimate point of the ultimate Continent, Paraguay, and on our right the farthest rim of Misiones, in the Argentine.

Quite suddenly, watching the light, we found ourselves within a hundred yards of it.

The broad-shouldered sailor was already grasping our luggage, the Captain and commissario shaking hands.

"*Felicidades, señor—felicidades, señora*. It has been a great pleasure and honour to have you aboard." We thanked

him heartily and jumped for the loose shingle of the steep bank as the "Doli" bumped.

"The Captain of the border lives on the hill," called the commissario. "*Felicitades, señores.*"

"*Felicitades,*" we echoed.

Two swarthy Indians appeared out of the black shadows of the night and seized our bags. We followed them, fighting for foothold, up the sheer cliff.

And we stood on the crest of the cliff looking down at the lights of the "Doli"—and faintly we heard a last call—" *Felicitades, señores*—good luck."

II. THE VOICES OF THE FALLS

As we stumbled over the crest of the cliff and groped after the dark forms of the Indians in the blackness of the night, we expected nothing much in the way of accommodation. Aguirre, we knew, was one of the loneliest outposts in the world, for to be at the very core of South America is to be a very long way from the haunts of men.

I said to Pat; "You feeling pretty good, old girl? This is a devil of a time to arrive. Don't suppose we'll get any for-rarder before morning."

"The sky doesn't look like rain," said Pat drily.

The Indians ahead of us came to a halt and we could make out the black shape of what seemed to be a log cabin raised on tall piles.

"Wait," said one of the Indians. So we waited.

A faint light shone from the chinks of the windows, and the Indian called twice respectfully. A moment later a door opened and a shaft of light illumined some wooden steps leading to a verandah. A man's tall form was black against the light.

There was a swift conversation.

"Two English," said the Indian. "Man and woman."

"Where from?" asked a cultured voice. "How did they get here? This time of night——"

"The 'Doli.'"

"The 'Doli'!" The tone of the voice clearly expressed doubt of what kind of people might be waiting in the outer darkness. There was a moment's hesitation.

"Very well. Bring them here."

We followed the Indian to the verandah. The tall man inclined his head courteously and held the wired door for us to enter. "Honour me by entering my poor house," he said.

We entered a large room, flooded with soft light from two oil lamps. The skins of jaguars and pumas lent a warmth to the wooden walls. The polished boards of the floor were relieved with three or four rugs, arranged with that appearance of carelessness that requires much taste and thought. In the middle of the room was a massive round table supported on a central pillar. Two deep armchairs stood one either side of a useful-looking stove, and the smaller chairs brought a gasp of delight from Pat. Their frames were of polished wood, and plaited strips of black and white cowhide were stretched across their backs, and their seats were made of similar wide bands of cowhide.

Our host, waiting courteously at our heels, said: "You like my home, señora?"

He did not know a word of English, but Pat's delight was unmistakable, when she answered in Spanish, "Muy linda!"

We observed our host for the first time. He was no less remarkable and unexpected than his home in the wilderness.

"Permit me to present myself," he said, heels together, and with a slight bow. "Intendente Brown,* in command of the border." We introduced ourselves and shook hands.

Intendente Brown was tall, lean and wiry, with crisp, crinkly brown hair growing rather far back from a fine breadth of forehead. He had alert grey eyes, a decisive nose, a humorous mouth, neither too tight nor too loose, and the

* Intendente Brown is the great-grandson of "Almirante" Brown, the young Irish sailor from County Mayo, who, wrecked on Martin Garcia on his first voyage to the River Plate, became Admiral of the Argentine Navy and many other things besides.

creased brown skin of his face was like leather. A gold watch on a plain leather strap showed beneath one spotless cuff of his white silk shirt which was open at the neck. His white riding-breeches were perfectly cut and his boots shone like black marble.

Our astonishment must have been apparent, for Intendente Brown made us comfortable and then explained:

"This is the last place on earth. But I do my best to be comfortable."

We agreed with admiration, for it needs an energy that many men lack to be clean, and comfortable when such things "do not matter."

We sat back gratefully in the cowhide chairs while Intendente Brown rushed around as happy as a schoolboy.

"It's not often I have guests. Now, what can I offer you? Brandy? A liqueur? Ginebra con limon? Caballo blanco?"

"White Horse—oh thanks," we chorused.

To our astonishment our host uncovered a modern ice-chest, disguised under an animal skin, and clinked ice into a water jug.

"Of course—I'm not entirely alone," he explained. "Balma is at Iguazu. We see a good deal of each other." His face clouded suddenly. "Balma is expecting you, of course?"

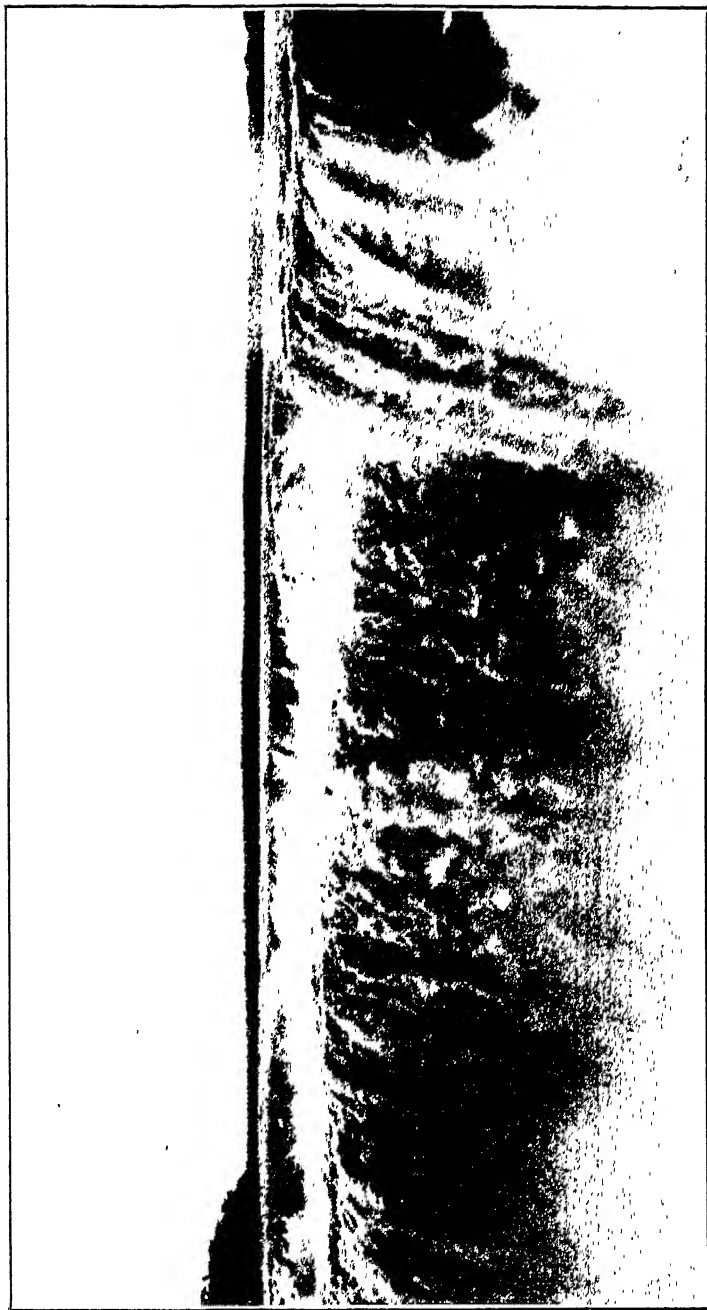
Balma, he explained, was Don Alberto's host at Iguazu.

"No," we said. "No one is expecting us." The Intendente was shocked.

"Fortunately I have a telephone line to Balma," he said chidingly, "and Don Alberto has built a road right through the virgin jungle from here to Iguazu. . . . Balma will want to have hot baths ready for you."

Here, where no one but a madman would have expected it, was luxury.

An hour later, we were speeding at fifty miles an hour over the road Don Alberto had built; the leafy walls of the jungle hemming us in; a young fair-haired German clinging to the



LA GARGANTA DEL DIABLO

wheel of a powerful American camion and revelling in the chance that had given him a night drive at full speed.

After Intendente Brown nothing could astonish us, but the huge bungalow of Don Alberto, built on the lines of an American ranch house, came near to doing so.

Balma welcomed us with the easy warmth of a perfect host, as our car jolted to a standstill at the wide verandah of Alberto's guest house.

"Enrique has been speeding," he said. "Not too fast for us," we assured him.

Balma was at first glance almost a replica of Alberto himself. His faultless grey *bombachas* bore the stamp of the best maker in Buenos Aires; his short soft brown leather boots held a polish second only to the miracle of Intendente Brown's, and gold teeth showed at the corners of his wide mouth as he smiled.

"I have ordered coffee for you," he explained, "and some chicken and caviare sandwiches, but perhaps you will join me in a liqueur brandy?"

We sat together in the comfortable lounge, waited on by Enrique, swiftly metamorphosed into a perfect waiter in a white jacket. We laced our coffee with brandy. Peace and contentment pervaded us. A smiling maidservant told us our room was ready and asked if she should run our baths.

Balma accompanied us to our room, and as we rounded an angle of the homestead, a vast rush of sound, somehow frightening, filled our ears and made us stop on the edge of the verandah. The night was calm. There was not a breath of wind and the moon had long since left the night sky to the stars. Sharply against the night we could see the weird shapes of trees. For the rest there was a void, a blackness and this vast mass of sound.

"*La Garganta*," said Balma softly. "The roar of the devil's throat. To-morrow you will see it."

We stood listening, tingling almost in awe, trying to imagine the maker of that great rushing sound. And as we listened,

smaller voices wove into the pattern; excitement leapt in us, our senses taut as we heard the falls and longed with fearful impatience to see the owner of that grand, wild, uncontrollable voice.

III. "LASCATARATASDELIGUAZU."

For three days we were alone with Iguazu. A kind of wonder and joy at being alive held us. We were content. We did not think of to-morrow, next year, next minute.

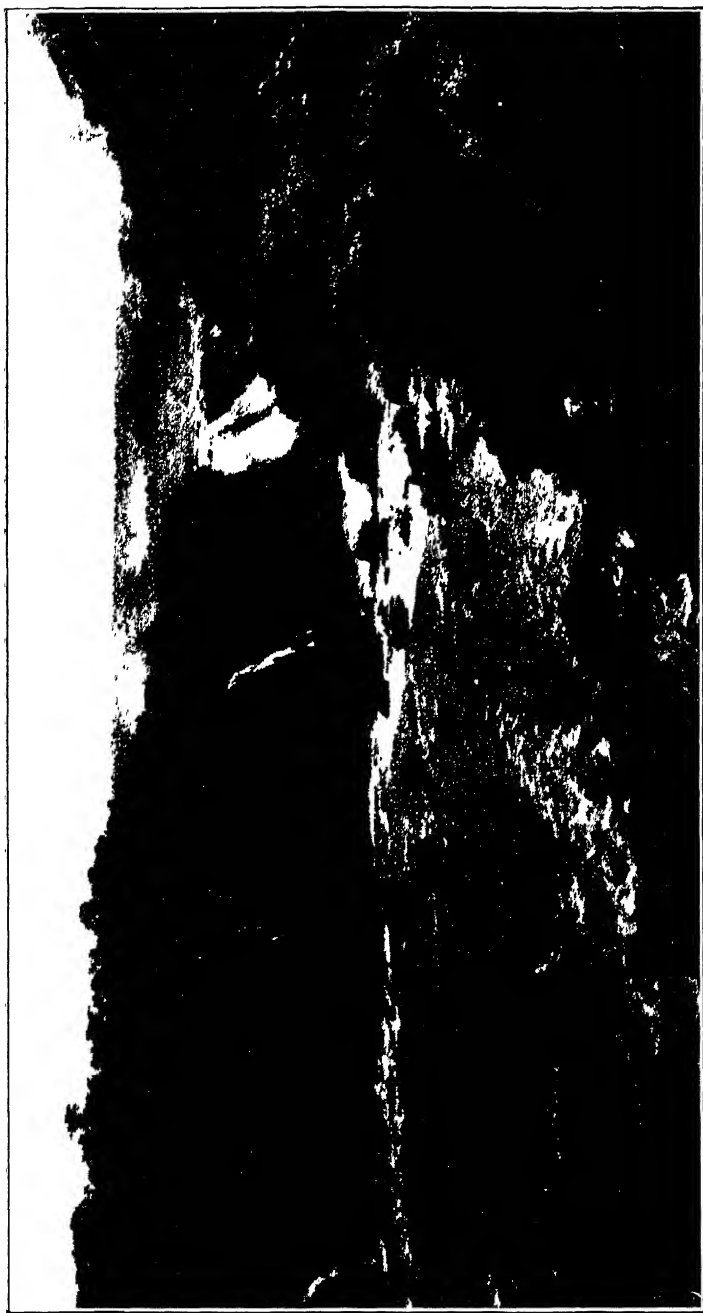
I am frightened. I am thought-stammering in anxiety to make you feel these falls or at least come as far as understanding how we felt. No one is able actually to realize the very summit and peak of exquisiteness which they find it possible to conceive. Something is always lacking. Nothing seemed to be lacking at Iguazu.

Before breakfast we saw the soft folds of cloud, rising, as it seemed, from a great rift in the forest. From the verandahs of the house we could see the line of the gorge into which the Iguazu river poured and hurtled, foaming in a maelstrom to meet the other tributary of the Alto Parana at Aguirre.

Away on the hill in Brazil there was a derelict mansion, which Balma explained had been someone's attempt at making a casino and an hotel years before, soon after a white man's eyes had for the first time marvelled at the cataracts. It was a foolish thing to do, to build an hotel in such a place. . . . Yet perhaps it was understandable. For one might think that when once men and women knew of these falls nothing would prevent them rushing to feast their eyes, to forget their worryings and their seekings in the belief that they had found all they wanted.

The din of life is so loud; and the din of the Garganta is but a lost whisper that reaches the ears of very few.

We followed the Indian along leafy passages in the jungle as the roar grew louder. Butterflies with wings cut to numberless patterns, flecked with brilliant colours and strange designs, soared and fluttered round us. We picked our way



THE IGUAZU COMPRESSING ITSELF WITHIN A NARROW GORGE

over rock boulders; small cascades and torrents bubbled at our feet. There were a dozen places on our march where we should have been content to stay and ponder and feast our eyes. Butterflies with wings like swallows shone like sapphires as the tumbling waters flicked at them, and with every swoop and flutter new colours shot their iridescent wings. All at once Domingo stopped.

We had reached the lip of the gorge, and straight ahead of us fell the cataract that is called "*La Garganta del diablo*," the Devil's throat.

Domingo urged us on.

From this first point the Garganta was four hundred yards distant. A great white cloud swelled almost to its lip and sailed up into the blue sky, scarved by a perfect rainbow. Small puffs of spray rose from a dozen hidden falls, and Pat said softly: "The birth of the clouds."

For three hours we circled the vast 3,000-metre bowl over which the Iguazu river pours to join the Alto Parana. At almost every stride a new spectacle as magnificent as the last halted us.

The waters have carved out of the solid rock this huge semi-circular bowl; a bowl filled with wild shrubs and flowers from which great trees and palms rise almost to the brink.

The river Iguazu is 4,000 metres wide and steps down with small cataracts for several miles before narrowing slightly at the main falls and compressing itself within a narrow gorge. Over the centre of the bowl roars the Garganta, half as wide again as Niagara and forty feet higher. The full force of the river falls eighty metres sheer to the torrent below, with a roar that has not ceased since time began.

But the Garganta, king of waterfalls, is not the main beauty of Iguazu. Spreading away from its wide throat a hundred small cataracts add their waters to the tumult beneath. None but the Garganta falls sheer. Rock ledges step them down so that they fall perhaps a hundred feet, and toss and tumble over boulder-strewn shelves in fine broken strands.

For hours we wandered among innumerable rock pools, and through breaks in the trees the water seemed to hang like lace veiling the rocks.

"It is sad," Balma said, when he came with us on one of our walks, "that it is three years since rain. There is no water. Usually these rock pools are raging torrents." But we did not feel it was sad. There was a beauty in the delicacy of the weakened cataracts, and there was always the Garganta with its power almost undiminished.

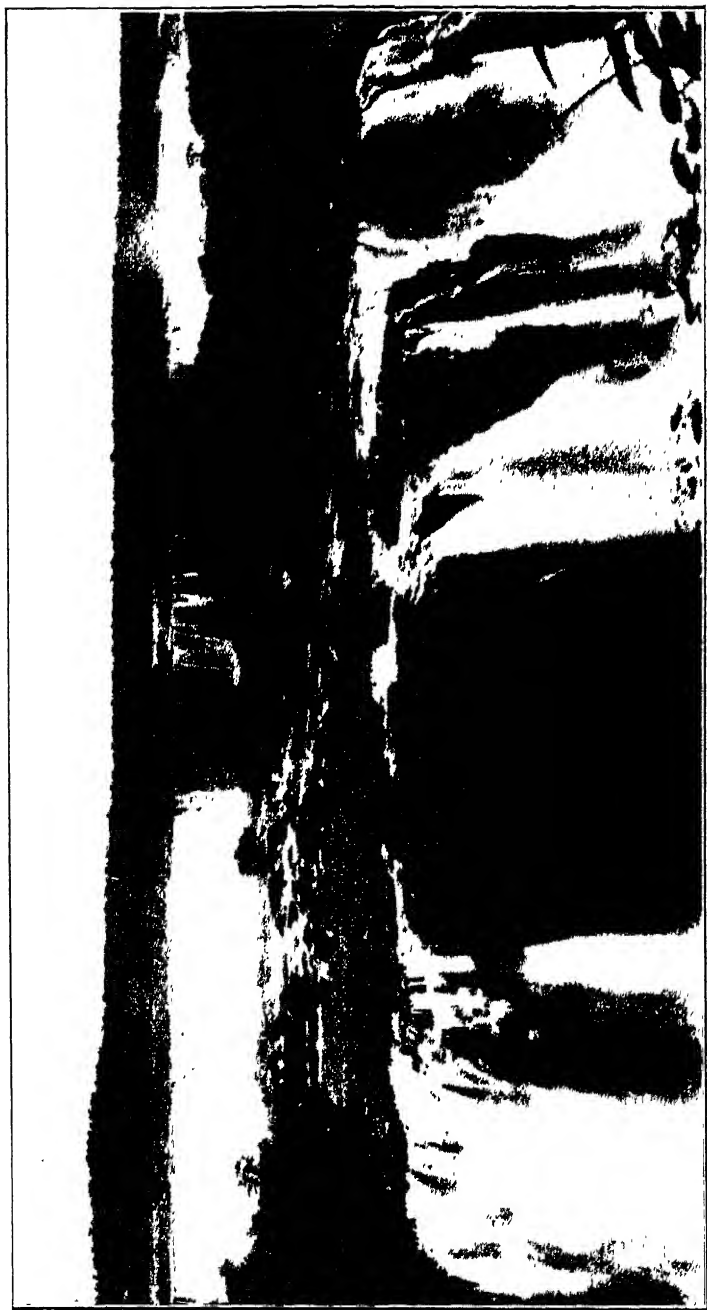
"There is enough power here to light the whole of the Argentine," Balma said. "Perhaps the whole of South America. The rock midway across the Garganta marks the frontier of Brazil."

With Balma and the two Indians, Domingo and Sabado, we took a flat-bottomed rowing boat over the waters above the cataracts and explored the wooded islets dotting the Iguazu river. It was a thrill to feel the pull of the waters as they seemed to gather speed near the crest of the Garganta; to see the fish darting amidst the rocks, and a few yards away the ominous thick-veined lip of the giant cataract. We clambered over rocks to stand above it, and I trembled while Pat stood calmly on the very rim of the rocks, looking down; for height does queer things to me that I don't like.

For three days we lost ourselves in wonder. We found a place under a palm, above two slender skeins of water bearing the name "*dos Hermanas*," where we sat unmindful even of the *mbaraguis** that hung in clouds around us, biting furiously. The only thing that made *mbaraguis* better than pulverins was that they were visible, and it seemed better to be bitten by something we could see.

A few feet away brilliant butterflies fluttered; rich red and gold, blue, green and yellow. The perfect unbroken veil of *bossetti* fell with a gentle song, and *tres musquiteros* careered to join in one thick strand, seeming almost within reach. High above the leaf-filled bowl huge spiders had flung their

* A Brazilian variety of the Chaco pulverins.



LEDGES STEP THEM DOWN

Facing p. 310

webs; the strands holding particles of moisture, sparkling in the sun.

As long as I live I shall know that I am going back some day to Iguazu, where orchids bloom as freely as primroses in an English wood; where butterflies flutter as thick as autumn leaves and rainbows span the rock pools where the great Alto Parana begins and the clouds are born.

IV. AGAIN NO TIGERS

Thanks to Balma and Intendente Brown our days and nights (we went to bed promptly at ten) were full of variety.

Balma was a perfect companion, with a subtle wit and a nimble mind. The thing, I suppose, that we found most remarkable about him was that he should be at Iguazu. By choosing him to play the host, Alberto had shown his lavishness and attention to detail.

With Balma we hunted; we fished; we rowed. We discussed the latest international affairs; commented expertly on the comparative leg values of *Taboris* and Cochran's revue chorus. We drank; we fed. We talked of the wild and criticized each other's choice of weapons, and we played truco. He was the perfect host; always charming; always faultlessly dressed and well mannered; always ready to smile or to be serious. Always without effort.

Nevertheless it was Intendente Brown who fired our imaginations. He was a ready-made story hero, complete with setting.

I found him sucking his maté on the verandah and arguing softly with a small monkey in a mandarin tree. It was half-past five in the morning, and the moisture lay thick and damp over the jungle as the sun began to steam things out. A brilliant rainbow spanned the gorge above the Garganta like a bridge of jewels, and the clouds that rose from the great torrent were rosy-hued with the dawn as they rode into the sky unbroken.

Intendente Brown stood beside me: "One does not get tired of looking——"

"No," I agreed; "It is always different."

"Let's hunt," he suggested. "Hot coffee or maté, whichever you prefer, is ready. I thought you might like to seek tigers with me."

How he had contrived to travel the twenty kilometres separating Aguirre from Iguazu without soiling his remarkable boots was a mystery. Within half an hour we joined him, and set out with two Indians armed with machetes, and struck off into the virgin bush.

We might have been walking on the ocean bed. The tops of the trees were lost in the vines that laced the jungle like a web. Only by following animal tracks could we proceed at more than a snail's pace in the wake of the leading Indian's whirling machete. I followed on the Indian's heels marveling at his skill and the strength of wrist that enabled him to carve a way through the heavy vines.

We soon found the tracks of tapir, huge ant-eating beasts with bodies as big as cows set on short thin legs. These animals bore tunnels through the bush, and, as we progressed, we found that smaller tunnels weaved here and there in a vast network. It was difficult to believe that ants could satisfy these huge beasts, but we saw narrow tracks through the jungle where ants an inch long were rushing about their business.

We marched on, stumbling over short stumps, tripping over the wiry vines, our senses keyed, ready to fire at the sight of a spotted hide; expectant for the vast whip of a boa constrictor's body; expectant for anything—and finding nothing.

That is not true; we found a good many things. The cloven hoof-marks of tapirs; the clover-like indentations of tigers' pads. Once the leading Indian stopped, taut as a wire, so that we could almost see his senses vibrating. And presently we came to a slight hollow in the ground still warm from a tiger's body.



BEAUTY IN THE DELICACY OF THE WEAKENED CATARACTS

For Pat and me, simple souls, there will always be a thrill in pushing through virgin jungle in the wake of wild beasts. In the jungle there is such a vast emptiness, a feeling of utter desertion that seems to hold the sounds of thousands of voices in its silence. The excitement in the jungle is just this excitement of the senses. Day after day there may be nothing. Then suddenly there may be something; a tiger; a snake, thirty feet long; a puma. It is never safe to relax. In a moment the emptiness may be filled.

I cannot walk passionless in the jungle.* One day it may happen I shall either know that all my reflexes are in good working order, or I shall know nothing more.

But there was not much real beauty. The virgin bush was too dense, too crowded with living things forcing themselves up to the light and sun from the heat of the green forest bed. The beauty was in a sudden clearing laced with huge spiders' webs, through which the sun slants striking fire from the moisture on the threads. For me there was also a shudder in the sight of the thick hairy legs and bulbous foul bodies that spin these delicate miracles of silken threads.

We enjoyed tiger hunting even though the echoes of our rifles did not often sound in the forest tunnels. And Pat earned the frank admiration of Balma and Intendente Brown. I wonder sometimes if Pat is ever frightened; if anyone would ever know it if she was. I think she has a mind that says: life is full of many things; I am not frightened of life, so I cannot be frightened of any of its parts. Her sense of values is secure in her own head, and no panic or admiration can delude her.

One day as we walked on the banks of the broad Iguazu river Intendente Brown handed her his revolver to try her hand with it. There was a heron perched on a rock out in the stream, four hundred yards away.

"Shoot that bird," the Intendente suggested.

* Not a tithe as dangerous as Piccadilly, and a haven of safety compared to Plaza Congress. Who walks passionless in these places, dies.

"Oh, no," said Pat with a slight shudder; "it would be awful if I killed it."

"It would be a miracle," I said.

Though we assured her that not even "Two gun Bill" would hit the bird at such a range she would not try. And Intendente Brown had to miss it himself.

One night, as we sipped our *caballo blancos*, Balma said: "Señora, it is a regrettable thought that you will be leaving us. Can't you persuade your husband to stay here?"

"At least," said Pat, "We might miss the boat to-morrow."

"I had no intention of catching the boat to-morrow, anyway," I said.

"To-night is the end of our foursome," said Balma. "Mañana turistas."

We were silent for a while, and then Balma said, with a twinkle: "Señora, these clothes look as though they had been made for you. I cannot believe you are wearing my *brasileños*."

"And my boots!" claimed Intendente Brown.

"And my shirt," I said.

"She is not wearing a stitch of her own," said Balma.

"Oh, yes," said Pat; "*Yo tengo uno chico à dentro!*"*

She had on some small fragment of her own underclothing, but our talk broke in laughter, and just then I did not tell her why.

V. ARRIVAL OF THE TOURISTS

Balma left in the camion for Aguirre. Domingo and Sabado spent the morning cutting stout staves. In the homestead there was an air of activity. Butterflies, snake skins and animal hides were attractively arranged. A vile-looking assortment of snakes in bottles stood on a shelf just outside the lounge. We felt at a loose end and wandered over the rocks trying to locate two Germans who, Balma said, lived in a rock cave near *Floriano* on the Brazilian shore.

We lunched alone and dawdled through the afternoon. I

* Joke only for those who speak Spanish. Sorry.



PAT

Facing p. 314

remembered the novel I had promised to complete and deliver on arrival in England, and looked through some rough notes. It was a miserable prospect. We were playing escoba without much heart when all at once there was a hubbub of voices. Half a dozen young people appeared at the wide double doors, paused momentarily; clapped their hands; gurgled; and jerked spasmodically into the room. . . .

" Oh, Berny isn't it too cute ! "

" Don't be so advanced-child, darling, "

" Oh look, Angela—do look ! "

" Ugh ! —it's snakes ! !—in bottles ! ! ! "

" How horrid ! "

The group of young men and women from the U.S.A. surged in a body to the snake department.

" Say—a monkey ! Isn't he adorable ? "

" In a mandarin tree—— "

" Oh—— "

" Oh—— "

" Oh—— "

It was exactly as if the curtain had gone up on a Noel Coward play.

We were noticed. The shrill babble of voices checked and babbled out again.

" They won't understand a word—— "

" They might—— "

Whisper—whisper—whisper.

A magnificent dark-haired woman with a bust like a battle-ship strode into the lounge. A large square man with a small button of a wife followed at her heels.

A perfect double of Mr. Robertson Hare (as he appears on the films) slithered in sideways apologetically, his domed expanse of bald head blushing scarlet. He had removed a beret that had sat like a blue pea on his naked dome, and was clutching it desperately in a large clammy hand.

We fidgeted uneasily. We resented this intrusion. We felt like selfish children at a party.

A raucous yankee screech from the verandah cut through the chatter like a ship's foghorn through the cackle of seagulls.

"Berenice—Berenice—Ask the *M oh-zoh** for hot water. I want to wash!"

Berenice shook her fair head irritably and moved towards the door.

"Say, Aunt Geraldine—' *Agua caliente*.' Ah—gwa—cah—lee—en—tay—He'll get you."

A slight petulance was noticeable in the subsequent croak of Aunt Geraldine. The poor lady felt marooned, deserted.

"*Moh-zo*," she yelled in a high pitched nasal wail. "*Moh-zo*—Ah—gwa—cah—lee—en—tay. . . . Say Berny, don't leave me like this," she wailed. "I want to wash."

But "Berny" was busy luring the small monkey from the mandarin tree.

An hour later the odd collection of tourists paraded on the grass outside the homestead. They were of all shapes, ages, sizes, nationalities. They all grinned rather foolishly. They all wore *bombachas* of wild colours and thin useless materials. Aunt Geraldine's were blue and white check like the kitchen curtains. Berny's were puce. They all wore rope soled Indian slippers. They all carried the staves Domingo and Sabado had cut. And in the midst of this group stood Balma, gold teeth gleaming, a fiendish grin on his brown leathery face.

We hated Balma at that moment.

But presently the chatter of the tourists died away in the wake of Domingo and Sabado, and we were temporarily at peace. Enrique, the waiter, sighed and brought us tea. Two hours later Aunt Geraldine's raucous nasal twitter burst upon us:

"Berny—help me! I feel I'm walking on *aigs*. It's these damn fool slippers."

Aunt Geraldine looked a picture of misery as she clung to

* *Mozo* = waiter.

her niece's arm, hobbling as if she had eggs under her heels, while Angela, her daughter, gambolled coyly with two young men.

We grew friendly with most of the tourists. There were two or three middle-aged Argentines, and "Robertson Hare" was what Pat called "a dear" and I knew that she must have strong maternal instincts. He wore his socks and suspenders outside his *bombachas*, and frequently adopted romantic attitudes at sight of flights of parrots, lizards wriggling over rocks, and often imagined snakes. He was very Galahad about Pat.

Our resentment gradually waned. Intendente Brown continued to appear as early as five o'clock in the morning to carve a way with us through the jungle. Balma's duties as host did not prevent him from playing truco in the evenings, while Berenice sat on the arm of Pat's chair, uttering muffled wonder cries:

"It's just too cute of you, Mrs. Taampson," as Pat winked possession of an ace of "legs."*

And on the arm of my chair was Aunt Geraldine's pleasant daughter Angela afflicted with a desire to learn Spanish, which showed itself in the constant muttering of poem fragments: "*Corre corre, sapito sapito . . .*" And there was something later on about "*en el bosque*." I don't think she knew she was doing this, for every five minutes, Aunt Geraldine (in this case "momma") would screech: "Pipe down, Angela. . . . And stop puzzling over that stupid game."

And now and then a triumphant: "It's coming out—it's coming out. Say Angela—I've got it out again!" would smash the peace of the lounge and make poor old "Robertson Hare" jump as if he'd been shot.

"Darn Momma's Russian Bank!" Angela hissed in my ear.

But we felt reasonably safe when Aunt Geraldine was fighting with her conscience over Russian Bank, for frequently

* We called bastons "legs" because they looked like legs.

she would find herself at a loose end. At these times she would sail up to our table so that we all had to leap to our feet. She would then hold us standing for half an hour (Intendente Brown and Balma not understanding a word of what she said, and we wishing we didn't) while she tried to "place" us "socially."

"Surely we knew the ffoulkes-Smythes of Footlebury?"

"No."

"No?"

"Of course you love those divine house-parties of the Pickled Archibalds of Bad Balderdash?"

"No."

"No——?"

"But you *must* know the Perry Winkles of Worcester?"

"No."

"Oh——"

Aunt Geraldine would turn away in disgust, but just as we were all sinking exhausted into our chairs, and dabbing our foreheads with handkerchiefs, she would come rushing back like a miniature cyclone.

"How stupid of me! Not the *Winkles*—the Wurzles of Worcestershire—the Mangold Wurzles——"

"No——"

I must have been in a very bad way as a result of all this, because I actually began to write, and the habit persisted until we reached Buenos Aires. Diary follows exactly as written on the spot.



TAKING MATÉ ABOARD THE DOLI

See p. 298



IT IS THREE YEARS SINCE RAIN

Facing p. 318

CHAPTER XV

“ WRITTEN ON THE SPOT ”

I. GOOD-BYE TO IGUAZU

WE had a desire to stand at the feet of *Bossetti* in the morning mist. Sancho, a young Indian, called us at dawn and the three of us swiftly skirted the falls, clambering over slippery rocks across the single plank bridges which once spanned raging torrents and now were huge dry mossy boulders with tiny limpid pools under their curves.

There was no time for side glances. Sancho was as nimble as a cat and flattered us by not looking back. At last we squeezed down a crevice and found a short ladder leading us down a tunnel of rock to some steps cut in the face of the sheer walls of the bowl.

A hundred metres ahead of us the “Three Musketeers” poured their foaming white columns into the mist which veiled them to their broad torsos, like early morning girdles round their waists.

Without pause we followed Sancho, scrambling over huge boulders to the very floor of the higher falls. The thunder of the Devil’s Throat dinned in our ears, and from the ledge of the Brazilian shore *Floriano* dropped its curtain to a plateau of shining mist under the sun.

Everywhere there were rainbows, always on eye level, and gradually, as the sun swept into the vast bowl awakening the green of the trees and the brilliant colours of the shrubs, half a hundred minor torrents came to life beneath the mist, all pouring into the gorge of the *Garganta*.

All this we had seen on other days, and yet not seen. One

could look and look again, yet still see small new facets of the splendid falls.

It was a hard route over huge moss-covered boulders to where the shining silver feet of *Bossetti* stood in a cloud of spray. *Bossetti*, now so slender and beautiful, is often a thick chord of raging water. To our right the *Dos Hermanas* slid slim tresses of silver, gilded in the early sun, over the green cliffs.

"Two baby sisters," said Sancho. "It is three years since rain!"

We could not imagine anything more beautiful. More vast, more grand, more terrifying in their tremendous force and splendour, the Iguazu cataracts may be, but not more beautiful. It was early morning while the *Garganta* was still giving birth to its clouds, and the butterflies fluttered around our heads like brilliant coloured leaves.

At eight o'clock we took coffee and went to Puerto Canoas, on the Iguazu river, to take a boat for Brazil.

It was a long row to the Brazilian shore, keeping high up above the *Garganta*. *Mbaraguis* hung in clouds over the brown sweating body of Sabado as he pulled the oars. But every time I caught his eye he smiled, swept a hand over his face, and continued to row placidly while Domingo manipulated the sweep from the stern.

Sabado is more likeable than Domingo, who is sober as a judge and does not even smile when he gets a five-dollar tip.

"*Muchas gracias, señor,*" and nothing more. A dollar, perhaps, would do. But Sabado is different. Little things like the sight of the navel in his round belly bursting from his shirt which always lacks a button at this point just above his *faja*, endear him to you. Impossible to be angry with a man who smiles all over his belly as well as his face.

As we crossed above the *Garganta* a hundred rock pools, and the slim shapes of fish, streaking from the dip of the oars, invited us to swim, but fourteen chattering tourists filled the boat, all dressed just so for waterfall gazing: rope soled shoes



FLORIANO

a la Indio, *bombachas* of every shape and kind, berets (*boinas* here) and stout sticks. Fortunately Aunt Geraldine and her brood remained behind.

The stink of citronella in the stern of the boat was worse than *mbaraguis* and mosquitoes, and about even as regards pulverins. Domingo's face was a heavy mask of distaste, and I think he envied Sabado, *mbaragui* pestered as he was, but out of the aroma.

We set off through the *montes* on the Brazilian shore, skirting the falls until suddenly *Floriano* was there; Floriano dropping a white and green curtain of God's own lace to the plateau of rock a hundred feet beneath; the thin film of water over the rocks reflecting Floriano's beauty. At once we were glad we had come to Brazil.

Beyond Floriano the Garganta thundered into the gorge; millions of tons of water pouring over its huge lower lip in a magnificence that never faltered.

For two hours we walked and climbed over rocks, amazed at every yard by the new miracles of beauty framed through the leafed arches of the trees.

We lost the tourists within ten minutes; the simple things of the forests, the birds, the strange lizards, the incessant screech of the *bichos*, to which we were accustomed, held them enchanted and awed. Meanwhile we wandered off, wallowing in beauty, wishing that films didn't cost money, and snapping off as many as we dared. There is a picture in every centimetre of Iguazu, and a different picture every time, each with its own especial charm.

From Brazil the whole panorama of the cataracts is spread out, a fairyland of the gods; mighty rock walls fringed with foam; trees mirrored in the pools, and the roar of the Garganta like the thunder of laughter from a giant throat.

After two hours we made our way back to the boat; looked for a moment at the placid crystal-clear water above Floriano, stripped and dived in.

That swim was glorious. The water tingled against our

bodies; the rock pools held sudden unexpected depths, luring us down; and there was the thrill of the pull of the water, the lip of *Floriano* so close, and the *Garganta* within a dozen powerful strokes; we two swimming alone at this ultimate point of three countries. Even the scourge of mbaragui did not take away from our exhilaration; nor did the return of the very proper tourists, eyes askance at our nakedness, but frankly envious.

It was a wrench to leave Iguazu, but I dared not stay. Time runs out so fast and there is so much to do; but I did not make up my mind until the camion stood ready with Balma at the wheel.

As the light of that last day faded we arrived again at Puerte Aguirre, sorry that the "Doli" was not there to give us the welcome we knew we should have had.

We stood on the upper deck of the luxurious little "Guayra," staring rather dismally at the short figure of Balma, with his well cut *bombachas* flowing over soft brown leather riding boots, neat scarf wound round his neck, and beside him Intendente Brown, tall and slim as a tree, his black riding boots gleaming even at night, and his lean face drooping dismally. Suddenly:

"Adios," they called. And with a great yell: "Truco! " With that the dismal parting broke.

"Quiero! Retruco!" I challenged back over the strip of churning water.

Laughter from the two men ashore sounded faintly. Balma began to strike wax matches and throw them aloft as they caught fire.

"Quiero. Vale cuatro!" came over the water. The faint voice was Intendente Brown's I think. I could see the two of them quite clearly, "'ta la vuelta!" I called, and back it came to me from the cliff: "'ta la vuelta! . . ." Whether from a throat or an echo I do not know.

It seemed we were always meeting people, liking people, leaving people. A journey full of grand memories.



THROUGH BREAKS IN THE TREES THE WATER
SEEMED TO HANG LIKE LACE

Facing p. 322

See p. 310

II. EL DORADO AND VICTORIA

I must hold up " Written on the Spot " before we arrive at El Dorado and Victoria in order to explain the bare facts of these remarkable " Colonial Adventures," the one English, the other German.

I believe, too, that it will be wise to leave these colonies without personal comment. Lawsuits have ruined me in recent years so that presently I shall only dare to write about " sunsets," and " bluebells in spring."

In 1919 a man named Schwelm purchased 76,000 hectares of virgin forest on the *Misiones* bank of the Alto Parana, 220 kilometres above Posadas. Later he increased his holdings to 200,000 hectares.

Schwelm paid \$7 Argentine paper per hectare for this territory. After surveying and roughly laying out (I cannot discover just what the " laying out " amounted to. Certainly the ground was not cleared ready for planting) he sold sections to colonists at \$30 Argentine paper per hectare.

To-day (1936) the price is \$100-\$200; or purchase may be arranged for 40 per cent. cash down, 20 per cent. the second year, and so on, at 6 per cent. interest.

Schwelm constructed a road at right angles from the river for 30 kilometres, and roads were built branching off this main artery at right angles until the whole area had been carved into ten-hectare blocks. To-day there are 200 kilometres of good roads.

The cost of clearing this land, cutting down trees to ground level and burning off, worked out at \$40 Argentine paper per hectare, and left much still to be done before the soil was ready for planting with yerba. Most colonists relied on catch crops of maize, mandioca and beans, and built their homes while the yerba was maturing.

Yerba trees were planted, 700 trees to the hectare, at a cost of 45 cents a tree. Hostels were built charging \$3.50 Argentine paper per day for colonists, until their homes were ready.

To-day El Dorado has a population of 1,000 Germans and is a going concern. There is a tax of \$1 per hectare yearly. There are schools and churches, electric light and telephones. Many settlers have radio. There is even a good-sized factory turning out mineral waters. And there is no malaria.

One hectare of 8-year-old yerba trees now produces 2,000 to 3,000 kilos of good quality yerba each year, selling at 1½-2 cents a kilo *on* the trees. Total production has exceeded 6,000 tons a year.

In addition there is an annual production of 6,000 tons of good quality tobacco, selling at 30-40 cents a kilo. Citrus fruit growing has become extensive, and there is a good trade in *madera* (timber) for furniture.

Schwelm lives in a beautiful homestead set in magnificent parkland, a veritable monarch, in the heart of his colony.

The story of the neighbouring English colony of Victoria, also a Schwelm enterprise, is not so good. For two obvious reasons: it is for English colonists; and English people can not live without cinemas and gossip and tea-parties; English wives do not consider it a part of their job to work on the land all day. Peasants are peasants; English people are not peasants.

Victoria consists of 62,000 hectares in process of clearing and planting. It has 30 kilometres of roads and 42 settlers. At Victoria the cost of clearing works at out \$90 Argentine paper per hectare, against \$40 at El Dorado.

We travelled south with the wife of a colonist. She was a fine girl; an ex-hospital-nurse. That means work. She had stuck it for a year. "We've got our trees in," she said. "Now we haven't a cent. They won't be producing for five years——"

"So what?" I asked.

She shrugged. "Oh, Hubby's got the offer of a job out East."

"And the yerba you've planted?"

"We'll come back," she said.

And that is the low down on that, as Aunt Geraldine would say.

III. SAN IGNACIO

Well, this Guayra's a good boat; small and matey. Skipper a dark-skinned, black-eyed Correntino.* I like the breed. The passengers, too, are freeing out. The raucous croak of the elderly American dame penetrates to the nethermost parts of the ship.

“ Berenice! This damn fool steward won't understand! Speak to him, Berny.”

And there's a large broad Argentine engineer of fifty-something, with a broad-beamed dumpy little señora, very kind and motherly.

So it's truco with the Skipper and the commissario. They win, but we give 'em a tussle. And after that truco with the Argentine engineer and “ Robertson Hare.” While “ Aunt Geraldine ” plays Russian Bank defiantly with her bored daughter, Angela.

We stopped at El Dorado old port to load yerba. We were having lunch at the time, and the Skipper popped his head through the *Comedor* window to tell us that if we wanted to cast our eyes over the colony we had better hop off and stroll round to the new port, which was in sight a few hundred metres downstream. So off we went, full of tucker and just as we were.

A broad red dust road led upwards from the river. We imagined, naturally enough, that the road (there was only one) must go where we were going.

Halfway up a *camion* with a few peons on the back platform gave us a lift. Already we were as coated as the green yerba leaves with the red dust. It was thick as paste on every conceivable thing, a part of life, like the air, so that for miles the sun shone dull brick red over the yerba plantations.

* The Guarani race are also found in Corrientes.

On went the camion, branching off to the left after a couple of kilometres.

"Hi!" I yelled, "We want El Dorado—to the right!"

"No, señor," said the driver cosily. "The road makes a wide circuit. Eight kilometres through the colony."

Name of a dog!

"And when sails 'El Guayra'?" I asked ominously.

"Half an hour—*mas ó menos*," answered the man comfortably. "Fifty bags of yerba she loads—no more."

"My God, old lady!" I said to Pat. "Here we are, it seems, until Friday."

So we got down from the camion and came up with an Indian walking the dusty road. We told him our trouble.

"*Es possible*"—he said judicially, "if you walk fast."

We decided to make a dash for it. Our tongues, eyelids, shoes, clothes, were coated with red dust. We suspected that it was also lining our entrails.

We looked around. Small green yerba trees undulated with the country for miles in neatly fenced plantations. Rust red roads criss-crossed the green.

We were quite happy. Neat gateways, like the lichen-covered porches of old English country churchyards, marked the plantation entrances. It was a good sight in the heart of Misiones, and we were glad to see it, even if we did miss our boat. Pat was hardened to that kind of thing, anyway.

Still, we made a dash. Pat had a blister on her heel, the result of our mountaineering efforts at the cataracts and the unaccustomed riding-boots she had been wearing. Also we were full of dinner, steak, macaroni and what not, and had been looking forward to a siesta half an hour earlier.

The Indian plugged on with us for a kilometre, before branching off down a side track with a pleasant—"Hasta luego—señores." Rather ominous, we thought.

Another kilometre, and by the grace of God, the rattle of a camion sounded behind us, and I stood right in the middle of the road. The driver pulled up unwillingly. We leapt up on

to the flat back platform, and grasped the rail running along behind the cab. Pat twined one arm through mine, one leg too, and so we stood, braced together, careering at 40 m.p.h. over El Dorado's red dust road. It was a grand ride. Settlers came out onto the wide verandahs of their comfortable homesteads and waved. Yerba, coffee, tobacco, sugar clothed the country for miles on either side. It was good to see a bit of orderly property fashioned in the heart of this distant province by a handful of Europeans looking for homes.

So we arrived at the New Port, and heard the “ Guayra ” tooting her execrable whistle from the river two hundred feet below. I slipped the driver a five-dollar bill and dashed into the cargo shed to get down the cliff face to the “ Guayra ” as quickly as possible.

The cliffs along most of this river are high and sheer. At El Dorado there is a good funicular, with a double rail, the loaded cargo truck going down under its own weight and pulling up the empty truck from the bottom, and so on.

This is something unusual, a real modern refinement, and a bit daft. For one thing it saves time. And what is time, anyway? Well, ask a *Criollo*. “ Time, señor? Simply there is time.”

Very nice and comfortable.

At any rate we had our own views about time just at that moment, and if we had had umbrellas perhaps the best thing to have done would have been to open them, hold hands, and simply take off, hoping for the best. But we hadn't got umbrellas.

Instead, there was a plank with cross strips of wood raised half an inch every couple of feet. This plank ran down between the double rails of the funicular. Down we went, I taking the lead.

I really ought to stop in this breathless account of adventure to recall a conversation that had taken place that morning.

“ You know, old girl, it gave me the ‘ willies ’ to see you

yesterday on the edge of those precipices and things at Iguazu."

"But you stood on them yourself."

"Just for an awful moment in the sacred cause of duty," I answered. "But height—I can't stand. I die a couple of dozen times a minute in imagination, hurtling down, all arms and legs, into raging torrents, gorges, and *qué sé yo*——"

"I don't mind that," said Pat, "but I can't stand on a plank suspended over nothing, or walk a plank bridge over a gorge. If it has wires on each side, even though they're pretty useless, I'm all right."

"Wires do make a difference," I said. "But on a height I'm no hero. It gives me a pain. Stick me on a plank on the ground or half a dozen feet above it, and I'm as surefooted as a mountain goat."

Well, this pleasant little plank run-way down the funicular hadn't any rails, and right underneath it was the good earth and red soil of Misiones—but a hundred feet underneath! I found that out halfway down.

We both leapt away down the plank, joyful as you like. All we thought about was getting aboard the "Guayra."

Then I realized a certain lack of material underfoot. I took a cautious look overboard, as it were; felt a bit sweaty; smiled happily in a rather green manner and planted one foot after the other with some show of firmness. My knees felt a bit peculiar. At this precise moment in the placid orderly routine of my life a small cry came to my ears. It came from not twelve feet behind me. "Tommy, old dear, I'm dizzy—can you get back to me?"

I thought of our morning conversation and it would have been quite funny if it hadn't been so infernally the reverse. I turned round and wandered back as casually as a cat that has left its paws in a rat-trap and spent a pleasant night chewing on the stumps.

"All I want," said Pat, in a small sickly voice, taking a grip of things, "is to look at your back. I can't look down."

“O.K., old girl,” I said merrily. “Fix the eyes—keep steady—down we go.”

“Not too fast,” she warned.

“Not too fast, I hope.”

Well. We got down all right. Hot as hell; tired; triumphant. We’d made it!—five minutes over the half-hour. Not guilty of holding up the boat.

“You’ve hurried,” observed the Skipper, lolling against the rail of the upper deck.

“We’ve hurried!” I agreed.

Five hours later, after loading 300 boxes of oranges, 300 sacks of yerba, and god knows how much *madera* for furniture, we sailed.

Funny, wasn’t it? Or so we thought.

Next Entry.

Posadas on time!

We were all pretty furious about this long wait at El Dorado. People had trains to catch, and the train service is not an hourly one in the Province of Misiones. And those who hadn’t trains had made up their minds to see the Jesuit ruins of San Ignacio—a whole day job, and unless we arrived reasonably on time we should have to change steamers and continue right on down the river to Corrientes.

So we fumed as the small bundles of *madera* came aboard, and those two funicular trucks played games pulling each other up and down, and our sailors sweated green yerba dust over their black fajas.

It was remarkable how the ruins of San Ignacio grew in wonder as the possibility of seeing them became more remote.

“Ah, señor—señora—*Que ruinas preciosas! Que lastima*, that we shall be too late,” lamented the dumpy little señora.

To me it was a relief. I could see us, wedged into an *auto* with half a dozen tourists, covered with caking dust, over four hours or more of the foulest roads.

And it happened. The night mist that usually falls over

the river in winter omitted to fall, and to our amazement we were alongside Posadas at dawn.

I made a few half-hearted efforts to escape the journey, but the tourists were determined.

"Señor," said the Argentine engineer severely. "You represent a great newspaper. It is your duty!"

For seventy kilometres we cast jaundiced eyes over country stark but for its occasional monotonous clothing of yerba. Roads and dust came up to our expectations, and Pat in her imagination began to realize what a wonderful thing is a cup of tea or maté cocido, or even a glass of water.

A constant fire of explanation exploded from the driver, proud as a father of the neat patio-ed schools, rather like English road houses, and the yerba spread over the country.

By the time we arrived we were prepared for the worst; to laugh our heads off at these so-called ruins.

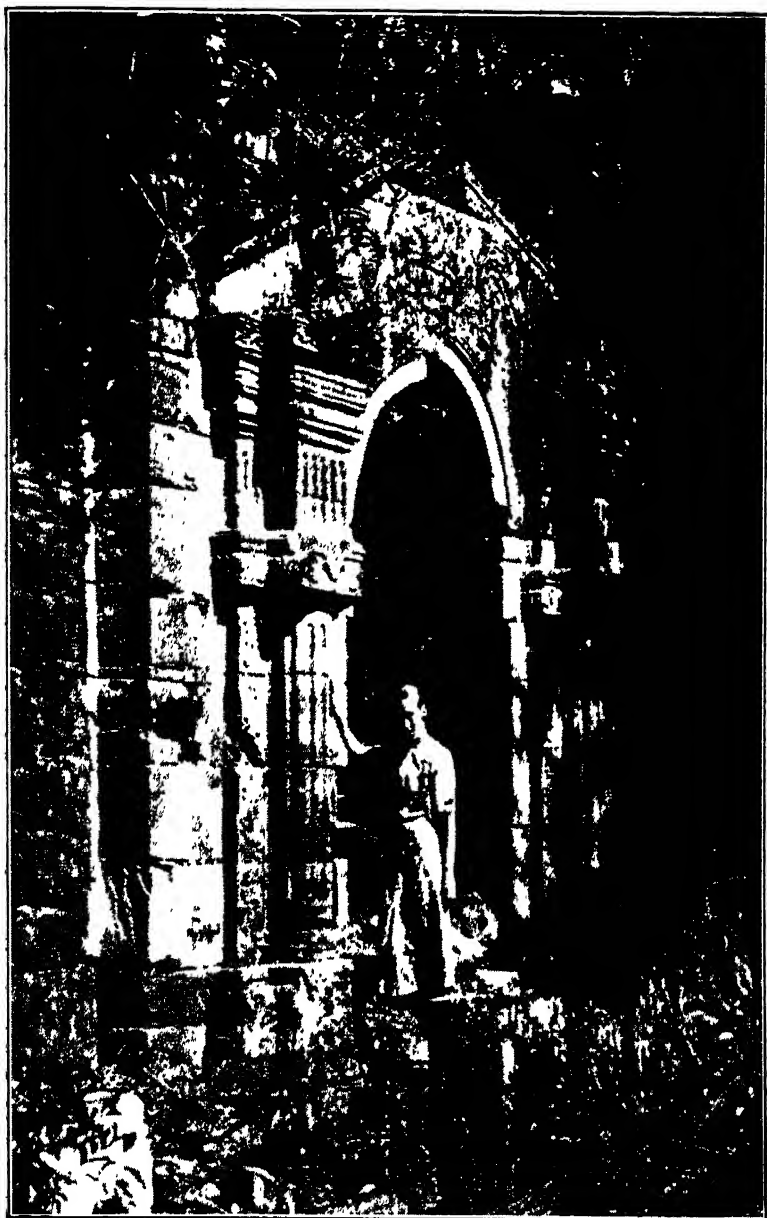
"Why, believe me bo—we have ruins in England——"

But they were good. They were building some new ones, too, near the main gate, and that pleased Pat. A new branch of the antique business.

Over an area of twenty acres the huge red blocks of stone were still recognizable as a cathedral, seminary and cloisters. Thick cords of vines interlaced the heavy stones of the walls, holding them together; great trees grew where once had been the cells of the monks, and one tree had grown up all round a column so that it had a heart of stone. There is an atmosphere of romance about these old Jesuit ruins. We imagined the Guarani Indians toiling at their work, their bronze backs caked with the red dust, their cowed masters in long, wine-coloured robes, patiently directing and urging them. All the labour was Indian.

So we stood about and explored the old ruins, wandering over the bones of men, and over history. All that sort of thing is easy to do at home; but it has a special charm in Misiones, and we *had* to make that journey worth while.

The honest Argentine engineer, his kindly, homely little



SAN IGNACIO—THE OLD RUINS

See p. 380

Facing p. 330

wife, and “ Robertson Hare ” (his *boina* like a blue pimple on his long and narrow bald head) made up our party. We made a tremendous meal at a *boliche* on the way back to Posadas, eating chickens that had been running round pecking in the dust when we arrived. We didn’t greatly fancy them, but the rough red wine that washed them down was good. A burst tyre enlivened the last half of the journey.

We arrived back on the boat without a respectable article of clothing between us, and stood under shower baths until the water whipping down the plughole assumed a normal colour.

We finished up that night in the *Plaza Paraguayo* looking over the river to the lights of Encarnacion and arguing like the devil with two bank managers and the charming Paraguayan wife of one of them (the other hadn’t a wife) on the difficult subject of the war of ’70. Had Misiones, Corrientes, and Formosa belonged to Paraguay?

Cunninghame Graham* and I said they had not. The little Paraguayan woman with all the fierce loyalty of her race said they had.

Perhaps the strength of her own native fire water—*caña*—of which we had partaken at dinner and after, added to the strength and futility of our arguments.

I believe that these provinces, like many other more or less vast and wealthless tracts, belonged to no country, and that it was war that had set boundaries which until then had been undefined. As in the nitrate deserts of Chile and Peru, neither country bothered to claim what was nothing more than a stretch of sand until nitrate had a value.

So, in the end, we came round, naturally enough, to the Chaco and the war in the Chaco, and here I was the staunch ally of the little Paraguayan wife.

Bolivia was well content to let Paraguay claim, and even

* *Portrait of a Dictator.*

sell huge tracts of the Chaco until oil showed its ugly dull brown stain.*

Soon after midnight we said good-bye and joined the steamer "Iguazu," to which we transferred from the "Guayra," and steamed a zigzag course towards Corrientes and the haunts of many men.

Next Entry.

It was at half-past five in the morning, illumined by the savage white-blue forks of lightning in the torrential rain of a long-threatened thunderstorm, that I saw the last of Paraguay.

The storm burst two hours before dawn, forcing the rain through the windows of our "Camerote," and at six we came alongside the "Ciudad de Ascuncion" at Corrientes and transferred ourselves. After a bad night I felt like hell, chasing luggage from ship to ship before finally tracking it down.

Pat, who had not waked up properly during the whole process, and had transferred herself in her dressing-gown from one boat to another, was curled up fast asleep in our new cabin.

We were, at last, on the way south. The thousand miles still separating us from Buenos Aires a mere nothing in this great luxury ship of the Mihanovich line.

But I was unhappy. The dark, bronzed faces of a score of eager-eyed men, from Mateo Montiel in the Chaco, and Lawes and Don Juan and dear old Don Federico, to the Guarani skippers of the small friendly boats, and Balma and Intendente Brown, flitted across my mind's eye.

"Truco"—said Montiel's voice—"Eso es che—Eso es——" "Que tiene amigo——?" "Truco! the very word means companionship and friendliness.

Sad to leave Paraguay—glad to be getting somewhere, with a decent bed to put one's bones on. . . .

* It seems I still believed oil to be the cause of war. Maybe I was right.

Eso es! (as Montiel would say).

Eso es. . . .

This river trip could go to the length of a book, and so could almost every chapter here. The Americans were with us all the way, contributing humour and annoyance. Angela found a young man to teach her the complete version of “ *Corre corre sapito, sapito* ”—and she learned what happened “ *en el bosque.* ” She was a poor pupil, I believe. Berenice left at Corrientes to visit friends. I think she was glad to escape Aunt Geraldine. A fierce young Englishman joined us from an estancia on his way to have a real “ blinder ” in Buenos Aires. We eluded him with difficulty. We met again the “ monk ” of earlier chapters. But there is no room for all these things. Let’s go to Bolivia now.

CHAPTER XVI

WEARINESS, WAR AND WORRY

WE did not realize how weary we were until we arrived again in Buenos Aires, and Don Vittorio greeted us in the lounge of his hotel.

"Vittorio," I said, "let us sleep. Let no one disturb us for a week. We are tired."

The stuffing had just gone right out of us. We had travelled and travelled and travelled, and I do not think my mind had stopped working and worrying for many hours in all those months. I have never been so conscious of a longing to rest as I was that day. We had made a good hit, and arrived back on the "home plate," as it were, but the game was not yet won.

As soon as we were alone, I said: "I just want to sleep . . . but I mustn't. If I sleep we shall never get to Bolivia. There isn't a moment to lose."

"If you don't sleep, we shall go home," said Pat grimly.

It was early morning when we arrived; and I slept until mid-afternoon, bathed, dressed and went out without disturbing Pat. I went straight to the shipping office and learned there was a steamer leaving for home in two days. The next one would probably sail four to five weeks later.

I wandered into Lloyd's coffee bar to think things out and make up my mind. I had \$500 pesos left, the equivalent of £25. I could sail for home in two days, and dismiss worry for at least four weeks. I had done a good deal. Had I done enough? This journey had been a desperate venture in the first place. Would I have failed if I went home now? It seemed to me that I would.

No man or woman had been to Bolivia and to Paraguay

during the progress of the war; no one had heard both sides of the question. It would crown my journey if I succeeded. I decided to go at all costs.

Newspaper men were waiting in the hotel when I got back. They wanted my story of the war.

"I'll give you the story when I get back from Bolivia," I said. "It'll be the true story then."

"When are you going to Bolivia?" asked a reporter. "They won't let you in."

"This week, and they'll let me in," I said, and went upstairs.

The next morning I had a bill from the Mihanovich company for \$250 pesos. Through an oversight our stay at Iguazu had not been included in our pass, they explained. The money would be refunded. Meanwhile I had no choice but to peel off half my roll of pesos.

Pat said nothing. She wanted desperately to go home, but she wanted me to succeed more.

Don Casto Rojas, Bolivian minister in Buenos Aires, received me with curiosity. Under the thick plate glass covering his desk top was a map showing Bolivia and the Chaco coloured green, and a small slip of land east of the Paraguay river labelled Paraguay. In heavy black type across the central green portion of the map was written—CHACO BOLIVIANO.

It was the first time I had seen a map with anything but "Chaco Paraguayo" or "Zona en litigio" or simply "Chaco."* It made me aware at once that I was in the enemy camp.

Dr. Don Casto Rojas is a small, dapper compact man, extremely courteous in the best diplomatic manner and a first-rate lawyer. I didn't beat about the bush.

"I want to go to Bolivia at once," I said. "I had just come from Paraguay and the Chaco—er" I nearly said "Chaco Paraguayo." It was only that large green map that saved me.

*Mr. Julian Duguid has recently shown me a map dated 1858 drawn up by order of the Paraguayan Government in which the Chaco is shown as part of Bolivia.

The Bolivian Minister was as surprised as a diplomat may be.

I told him frankly the view I had of the war as the result of my visit to Paraguay.

"You can't let me go home to England thinking the way I do," I said.

Casto Rojas was charming. His son, just back from Villa Montes, set himself to the task of my conversion. I began to see that in Bolivia I should need all my tact, of which I have very little.

My passports were especially counter-endorsed by Casto Rojas, requesting the frontier authorities to pass me through on a "special mission." The consul counter-endorsed this yet again.

"Which way are you going?" they asked. I didn't know. Which way was I going? Which way could I go? I had £12 10s. od., and *La Paz* is two thousand miles across Argentine and the Alti-Plano of the Andes. And Pat. . . .

"It's an exhausting journey," they said. "You really should stop off halfway up the mountains to get your lungs and heart used to the altitude."

I laughed. The idea of stopping off anywhere was funny. It was going to be a dash or nothing.

I went round to the F.C.C.A.* and asked for a pass.

"Very well," they agreed. "But our pass will only take you the first thousand miles to Tucuman. You'll have to see the head of the State Railways. Good luck . . ." The "good luck" sounded faintly sinister.

I rushed down to the head of the State Railways. He was a dour Argentine engineer with a reputation. Passes were only issued by the government in very special circumstances. I got my pass, but it only carried me a further six hundred miles to La Quiaca, the frontier.

I went back to the F.C.C.A. They had an obliging publicity manager, a Londoner with a sense of humour.

* The Central Argentine Railway.

"What happens now?" I asked.

"Well, I'll give you the name of the general manager of the Antofagasta Railway in La Paz . . . but you still have the Villazon-Atocha line to contend with."

I took a note of the name and worked out a cable.

"But," added the publicity manager, "you'll have to pay for your sleepers. That'll be twenty pesos. Thank you." I paid him.

A terrible thing had become obvious; I couldn't take Pat. The trip had begun to tell on her. The strain of this last dash over the mountains would be terrific; also, it might be dangerous. I had a serious talk with Don Vittorio.

"Look here, Vittorio," I said. "I'm hard up. I'm going to Bolivia. I must go. Look after my señora with your life."

"Don Reyí," said Vittorio. "I have known you for a very long time. Count on me."

We had a drink. "May your bedrooms never be empty!"

That evening two things happened. Don Casto Rojas sent a message to say that Don Carlos Aramayo, the finance minister, was arriving from Bolivia next day, and that he strongly advised me to see him. That meant a delay of one week in Buenos Aires, but the strong advice of the Bolivian Minister is not to be held lightly.

The second event was happier. Don Pablo, whom you may remember from the days on the yacht, arrived at our hotel preceded by a vast bunch of roses. He had read of our arrival in the newspapers.

Looking back now I think that it was probably the arrival of Don Pablo that decided my dash to Bolivia. My thoughts were buzzing in my head like bees under a cullender. In five years I had not been away from Pat except for the two periods of fourteen days when she had been in nursing-homes with the babies.

Don Pablo settled it.

"Your señora must come down and stay with mine at Azul

for the whole time you are away. She'll love it down there. It's absurd to consider taking her to Bolivia." He grew grave. "I have a very important proposition to make to you. . . . It will pay you to remain in Argentina for a week or two upon your return."

If we had had some money the week that followed in Buenos Aires would have been very enjoyable. Don Pablo was our saviour. We dined at his magnificent mansion and met his charming wife. We went down to the Tigre on sunny afternoons, and dined at quaint little restaurants on stewed octopus swimming in their own ink, and later yelled with the excited crowds at the all-in wrestling.

In the midst of all this, Don Pablo unburdened himself about his "proposition." I had written a good deal on the subject of Argentine beef, he knew, and he wanted me to write more. My words carried weight, he said, because I had not only worked through the cattle business in Argentine, but also in Australia.

Would I work out a publicity scheme? I quite definitely would.

Meanwhile Buenos Aires put on its party dress. President Vargas arrived from Brazil in an ancient battleship, paying his first visit to Argentina. Relations between the two countries had seldom been friendly, and often strained. This visit would end all that. Aeroplanes circled the warship out in the roads and escorted it to its berth. Ten thousand pigeons, their wings painted blue and white in the Argentine colours, were released from Plaza Mayo to dapple the sky with their wings. The Plaza Mayo itself was a miracle of brilliant lights. The Avenida de Mayo was tiara-ed in filigrees of gold, white, red and green lights. Arches of light that seemed as delicate as lace framed the principal streets and squares. The photograph of President Vargas was in every shop window. Eighteen orchestras played in the *Avenida de Mayo*, and thousands of fiesta mad people danced in the streets. It was too terrific to mean anything.

Two days after these festivities began I left for Bolivia. I gave Pat \$50 pesos and a pass I had managed to get to Azul, Don Pablo's estancia three hundred miles south. I had still no word from the Bolivian railway manager in answer to my cable. I boarded the train with exactly \$172 Argentine pesos, \$100 of which I already owed to Vittorio, and watched Pat's dear anxious face fading away in a blur. I slumped back into my seat utterly worn out in mind and body and quite unable to rest. But in a way I was glad.

CHAPTER XVII

BOLIVIA—A COUNTRY AT WAR

I. A NEW WORLD

I WAS travelling in a humour I had never known before. I felt the gravity of the mission I had undertaken. This was no wild journey. Anything I said would be "taken down and used in evidence against me." Loose comment would henceforth be a crime.

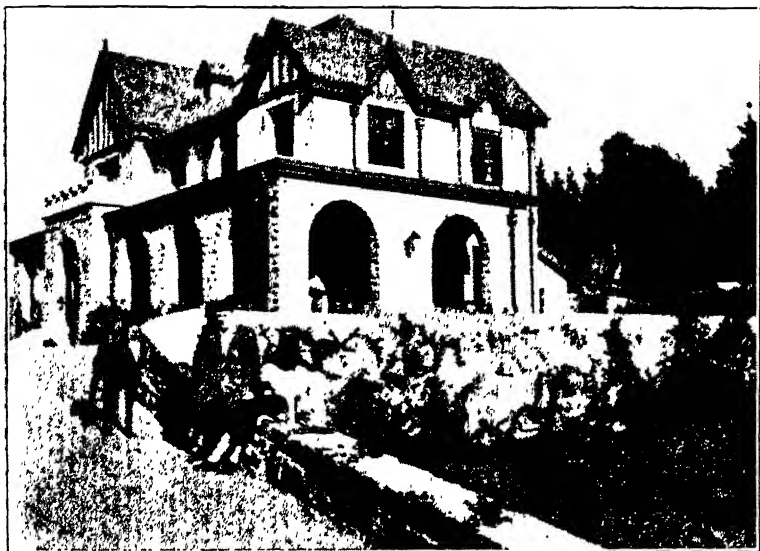
I felt infinitely small as I sat huddled in my corner, the excited-sounding bubble of conversation of the compartment's three other occupants scarcely reaching me. I had dived headlong into this business, a matter of life and death. I looked back in awe and wonder, not only at myself, but at dozens of newspaper men, dozens of stockbrokers, clerks, labourers; faces of people in railway carriages, pubs, clubs, offices, all commenting on world affairs, national affairs, domestic affairs, settling great problems with an airy phrase.

How often had I done the same.

"What do you make of this Japanese affair, Thompson?" Or this Russian business? Or this Turkish bother?

And my own voice answering awed me. What did I know? What could I know? What did any of the casual commentators know? Yet we all solved the world's affairs so glibly; so sagely.

Now, I would know about something. It was as though, caught commenting on a great legal matter, I had suddenly been whisked onto the seat of judgment. I felt a tremendous responsibility. Thousands of men had died, thousands more had yet to die in the Green Hell of the Gran Chaco. Truck



DON PABLO AND PAT AT LOS ANGELES, AZUL

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CAMION ON SANTA FÉ ROAD. THE DUST TRACKS ARE IMPASSABLE
AFTER SLIGHT RAINS

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loads of fat-faced *Cholos*, *Quechuas* and *Aymaras* were even now jolting down the steep slopes of the Andes from Villazon to Villa Montes. Shiploads of *Guaranis* were zigzagging upstream to Concepcion and setting out across the jungle—to kill; kill; kill. . . .

Why? Whose fault was it? What man or body of men had engineered this thing? I should know—more, perhaps, than any other onlooker in the world; and knowing I should have to say.

The suave even voice of Don Casto Rojas had said:

“Do you know the whole history of the Chaco? Have you read the findings of the *Audiencia de Charcas*? ”

It had all seemed so simple. It was all so complex. By the time I arrived back in Buenos Aires the newspapers would be clamouring for my judgment. . . . “Who is the murderer? ”

And I would answer. . . . What would I answer? . . .

Casto Rojas had come to Retiro station to see me off, and had placed a large heavily-sealed packet in my hands. “Señor Thompson, may I entrust this package to you to deliver into the hands of His Excellency the President as soon as you arrive in La Paz? ”

I had accepted the package gratefully. And turning to my wife the Bolivian Minister had said:

“Rest assured while your husband is in my country. We are at your service, señora, at all times. Do not hesitate to make demands. They will be our happiness.”

It seemed to make things harder. I would have to squash my streak of sentimentality, and try to wash out my liking for people, my too easy response to flattery, to kindness.

Hour after hour the brown plains sped by, unchanging. The brown grass lay parched and faded under the sun, rainless for months. Muddy hollows, hoof-pitted by cattle seeking to slake thirst; seeking to suck moisture out of mud, scarred the earth like scabs. And dust was over everything.

And sometimes there would be a horseman sitting his steed motionless, watching long before the train arrived, long after it

passed, as I had once watched, hearing the eerie hoot of the monster as it came rushing like a dragon over the plains, a link with people, with cities, and civilization. And then in a roar and rumble it would pass, leaving a gash in solitude, and disappear, and the horseman would remain still, until the tremble of the train had left the earth, and he was alone again, alone in this immense dull brown sea of the plains.

Buenos Aires Province gave way to Santa Fé; Santa Fé to Santiago del Estero, and still I sat thinking; still my three companions sat talking half excitedly, casting occasional glances to my corner.

In these hours I had gone back piece by piece over the ten years since I had last travelled these plains, trying to work the pieces into a design: to find out where I had gone wrong. And it seemed to me that I would at last lift the lid of these years and climb out into a new period. This journey would begin me anew: give me new vigour; give me freshness.

"Pat," I had said, "I won't be long. It'll be worth it. Without this last venture we should have failed. Now we shall not fail." And things were tidy in my mind. It was in that train that I ceased to drag the weary chain of the past at my heels, and looked at the future. From this moment we should succeed.

"Señor," said a lean man, whose face bore the lines of the camp, "You are very silent. You have been thinking a great deal. Join us at dinner, will you not?"

His dark curly hair came to a widow's peak in the centre of his deeply furrowed forehead.

"That is good of you," I said. "I have thought enough."

We dined in the Pullman; drank wine; dined, and talked of cattle until midnight. I felt refreshed and confident; but it was not my old slap-dash confidence.

"My estancia is out from Santiago Del Estero," said the man with the widow's peak. "We arrive in the early hours. Will you be my guest when you return?"

The warmth of these men, sincere or not, was pleasant.

They invited me to their homes with intense earnestness. What did it matter whether or not they meant it?

And in the morning when I awoke, the train was rushing through a new world. Forests of tree cactus stretched away into the distance, and presently as I breakfasted, the green stems of sugar-cane rose upon either side of the train, shutting us in.

"This Tucuman," said one of my companions, he was fat and a farmer—"is the garden of the Argentine. We have twenty-eight sugar factories. Ah, señor, it would not be fair for you to return without seeing my factory——"

Pink plaster homes and huts, tumbledown but warm and pleasant, in their settings of bright flowers, and shrubs and trees, split the fields of sugar-cane that swept in soft green billows to the horizon, and the sky westward took on a faint purple hue that slowly deepened, and became a vast purple wall almost to the roof of the sky.

It was my first sight of the Andes, restful, yet thrilling, like finding God; finding that the brown plains over which I had ridden with Sombra years before, had an end . . . for they had seemed to go on for ever.

But now it was the beginning of my journey. And I thought as I saw the purple background of the giant range that runs from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska, that I was seeing the first wonder of the world that I had ever seen; and queerly, for I have travelled a long way, and know the meaning of one thousand miles, it was suddenly clear to me as it had not been before why Tschiffely is a hero, why there are statues to him and his wonderful old Pampas steeds. What must these mountains have seemed to him as he camped under their purple bank? And day after day rode slowly into their embrace, over them, beyond them, on and on, through dangers and difficulties almost unimaginable. Even the march of San Martin with his army had been easier.

I wandered for a time in the old city of Tucuman, in the squares the wild Carreras had known and Jose Carrera had faced a firing squad; where Argentine Independence was

signed; where Bernardo O'Higgins, San Martin, and half a hundred of the old heroes had camped and fought, and judged, moulding the history of this great land, moulding nations out of colonies.

Tucuman is the real beginning of the Argentine; the place where the seed of its future greatness was sown. Now the roots are secure and the seed is a huge, thriving plant.

What do you think of that? In your railway carriages, offices, pubs and clubs? Running the world! Have you ever heard of Tucuman? Or hasn't the growth of this vast nation cast even a shadow? Haven't your newspapers talked about it?

So I wandered in Tucuman in the shadow of the purple mountains, the garden of the Argentine clothed in a wealth of growing things, wondering how much longer the world would ignore South America; how much longer it would be a site of "tinpot revolutions," of "gold lace and admirals" in the jaundiced eyes of Europe.

All that day I sat on the observation platform of the metre-gauge State Railway train as it crawled up through Jujuy; huge tree-cactus clothing the hills, that still held a tinge of green.

It was a new world into which I was going, and it looked a new world. Behind us, as we climbed the narrow tracks, the hills began to close in, always changing; growing arms; throwing out spurs and foothills that crept around us until we were in their midst, and the world of the plains was gone. The mountains reared up on all sides and seemed to be chasing us; to be closing in; to be towering over upon us, as we fled before them. There was a grandeur, an immensity that held us silent in the observation car of the climbing train. There were two men besides myself, and for two or three hours we had not spoken. Presently, one of the men, a young square jawed Argentine-German, said: "This is my first time in the Andes, señores——" And then he had no more words to express the awe and wonder that had urged him to speak.

He was a pleasant companion. We fed together and talked of our lives and our plans. He had been born in Santa Fé

of German parents, and had a small estancia on which he bred dairy cows. He hoped to sell some prize stock in Bolivia. He was ardently pro-Bolivian, which was not only wise but natural, since many German officers were fighting for Bolivia in the Chaco, and Germans had trained the army.

Together we delighted in all we saw that day. We stopped at stations with names that rolled round our tongues like full-bodied wine. *Rosario de la frontera*. . . *Ruis de los Llanos* . . . names that Cunninghame Graham and W. H. Hudson would weave into word patterns.

Swarthy men in huge ponchos of *vicuña* stamped their booted feet in the dust, and stuffed hot *tamales* into great mouths made for laughter and champing food. Indians squatted on their haunches outside their huts taking *maté* and offering the *maté* one to another with gestures full of grace. It is a small gesture they make; a slight offering movement of an arm which holds a bow, a flow of honeyed words, a grace and courtesy, age old, rooted in the ancient civilization of these mountains. It is a gesture that no man could learn, and many could lose . . . for these Indios were more primitive; more gentle; than those of the lowlands.

At first through the afternoon there were great trees in the dense *selva*; but presently the trees gave way more and more to tree cactus, and the cactus itself began to change; became slimmer; spaced over the mountains like totem poles; like acrobatic groups: scarecrows; old sign posts; clowns. . . . There was an animal quality in those plants as they stood like tired candelabra; thick stupid arms curved and tired. They would drive a man mad, so that he would want to shout at them; hit them; make them wake up. There they stood like dead men; bodies, utterly stupid.

So we climbed through all that day, the mountains unfolding in vast menacing designs, until evening fused them to blue, to black, and at last, although they were invisible, they could be felt.

The train filled and emptied from station to station. Cattle

men wrapped in their warm *ponchos* drowned the narrow saloon car in thick blue tobacco smoke, and filled it with gusts of words. A waiter who must have weighed seventeen stone frisked lightly as a ballet dancer, always with a laden tray, always with lips pursed tight as though his breath were held. He was a miracle of a waiter. At Güemes in the province of Salta he served a dozen of us with soup, chicken, mutton, beef, fruit, cheese and wines; sweeping plates, bread, cruets, glasses and bottles from table to table, as though he worked to music; an unerring rhythm.

The young German-Argentine went to bed early, but I do not like a lonely bed, and prefer to stay up until I am so tired as not to care about anything. I was drinking coffee at my table when a man who had boarded the train at Güemes, leaned across from the other side of the saloon, and said:

"Pardon me—you're English?"

"I am," I said, "and glad to meet an American."

We drank together and talked.

"Lot of Americans in Bolivia, aren't there?" I asked.

"Americans! No, Sir," he said, as though accused of stealing an apple. "You'll seldom meet an American. Plenty of English."

"Oh——"

He was a mining engineer, an excellent companion, and full of interesting information, mainly geological. At the moment, he told me, he was a kind of walking bank, running around trying to find something to do with thirty million bills.

"We're all loaded up with bills," he said with a hopeless gesture. "Your railway's stuck with nine millions."

"Bills?"

"Sure! *Bolivianos*—money. We call 'em bills."

II. OVER THE TOP

This American was a quiet, dark, rather drooping man, with extraordinarily alive dark eyes in an otherwise listless

face. His American accent was strong without asserting itself, and he had a dry manner of speaking that invested his words with a sense of importance.

The more we talked the more glad I was to have met him. He knew the mountains, and his love for them had in it a good measure of hatred: they fascinated him. I imagined that he would grumble freely that he had not had leave for five years, and that, given leave, he would be indignant and loath to go. His slow, rather rich, drawling voice, veiled the enthusiasm that lit his eyes. Hearing him without seeing him I would have thought he was rather casual; rather sneering. But he wasn't. Also he was a first-rate mining engineer, as well as being a temporary "banker-financier"—or whatever you would call a man "toting around" (as he put it) thirty-one million bills.

"You'll not sleep to-night," he said. "It's not worth while turning in. The clatter of the rack and pinion'll wake you, and you'll lie listening and wondering. Best sit around and talk——"

It was about half-past two in the morning when the train gradually slowed, shunting itself jerkily to a halt. We got out, and walked the length of the train to the snorting, glowing engine. The night was like black ebony, set with diamond stars. The air was crisp and cold, and there was none of the velvet quality in the darkness of tropical nights I had left only a week or two behind me.

We took deep breaths of the sparkling air that was not yet thin.

"You'll feel it at the top. Take things easy," said the American. His eyes appraised me. "You'll do O.K. You're not carrying any fat around. Don't get worried when your heart thuds away. . . . We go up fast now—about 8,000 feet on the rack in the next hundred miles. Then we'll be on the top."

Already at Jujuy we were 5,000 feet above the plains of the Argentine and the sea. I had a vague feeling of thrill and of

awe at thought of the vast barrier I was about to cross. And from the moment that we began the last terrific climb I had a feeling of jumping off into a new element; for from the top to the bottom of the Andes seemed a greater distance than thousands of miles on the level. There was a sense of being cut off from the world.

All through the night we climbed, and in spite of the clack of the rack and pinion I slept until we had topped the pinnacle of Tres Cruces and began to fall slightly to the frontier at La Quiaca.

So I opened my eyes suddenly to this new world, to see fat Indian faces staring cowlike into my sleeper without apparent amusement, wonder, or anything but a gentle, doubtful observation. I got up hurriedly. The sun was shining over a world without shadows, a grey bright hard world of an absolute flatness, seeming two-dimensional. Mud huts, the colour of the earth on which they stood, spread around the train, as if they were natural growths from the hard plain. There was no sign of any growing thing; but the vivid garments of the Indians dappled the grey with bright colours like clusters of flowers.

I wandered out, feeling no ill effects from the altitude. Groups of Indians squatted over the ground, some cooking food over small fires, others simply sitting. The clusters of colour, the pink, blue, yellow and green splashed blankets and ponchos of the Indians, seemed to writhe and weave with the slow movements of the wearers. The dark fat Indian faces were all framed in straight black hair, that fell in thick plaits to the women's waists, and all wore hard full-crowned white hats with small brims that sat firmly on their heads. These had the look of being enamelled, and were more like jerries without handles than anything else I can think of.

They say in Bolivia that if you snatch a woman's hat the owner will chase you to China, or wherever it is you happen to be going. They stopped a revolution that way once; simply sneaked a hat and ran. So did the revolution.

"These women are real tough," said the American. "They'll fight like devils. Try lifting a hat——"

"You try!" I said. "I'll take your photograph."

It is a minor miracle how these hats stay on. They appear to balance precariously on the large Indian heads, yet are immovable in a gale of wind.

But they were a happy-looking people, ready with smiles, faint giggles, bashfully hiding their faces, and behaving like fifteen-year-old country girls at a village dance. Their shyness was engaging and happy.

Our engine had now collected a dozen extra wagons and turned round ready for the return journey. The waggon were crammed with Indians, and, presently, the weird full notes of reeds and pipes with a vague beat of drums seemed to weave itself into the texture of all that I was seeing; a background; an accompaniment to life. The sounds grew in slow crescendos, immeasurably sad, yet soft without wailing notes. Most of the Indians blew small wooden pipes, their fat cheeks puffing, and crumpling to bashful smiles the moment they felt my alien eyes on them. They smiled with a natural easiness that compelled an answering smile, and some of them shook their heads and could not purse their lips for laughing.

And while they drew full sweet notes from the wooden flutes others tapped small drums of llama hide with their fingers. It was all lazy, slow, a timeless melody, as though they told an age-old legend that could not be hurried.

Seeing all these things I forgot to be hungry. It was nearly eleven in the morning before our sleeper coupled with a Bolivian engine and moved towards the frontier line and the Bolivian station of Villazon a few hundred yards ahead.

"No breakfast to-day," said the American. "We'll get some food on the Bolivian train. Your passport's O.K.?"

I hoped so. I had almost forgotten wars and worry in the excitement of arriving on the roof of the world.

"Say—you've come from the Chaco and Paraguay!

Well, you've got a nerve ! " said the American, when I showed him my passport and told him some of my worries. " I'll help you through. I know these people."

Without his help I might have been marooned at Villazon indefinitely. It had none of the brightness of La Quiaca. Hundreds of Indians stood at attention, or at ease, but always uneasy in their unaccustomed uniforms. Their fat faces had taken on a kind of portentous gravity; a wondering half-defiant look: we are soldiers. These uniforms make us important. The grey green uniforms of prickly coarse material became them ill. Their fat curves bulged in the wrong places. They could not look smart. Sight of them aroused at once feelings of pity and anger. Their gentle Indian ways had gone, their easy laughter had gone, leaving their faces dull and stupid.

Here and there officers paced up and down in pairs, conversing intensely, their musical comedy capes, with bright epaulettes, and gold chains at the throat, flowing at their heels. Half a dozen officials boarded the sleeper, and the American, the German-Argentine and myself had to await their pleasure. A tall woman with black hair parted in the middle, over a pallid face with bright button eyes, came in to my compartment and locked the door. She delved into my suit-case and searched my blankets and bedding. She held my hand while examining my papers; smoked a cigarette; and asked if she might borrow some periodicals I had with me.

The officials performed the examination all over again. The sight of my heavily sealed letter to the President induced their respect and eased these preliminaries. They handled the letter with reverence.

The American came in with me to the frontier authorities. They examined me carefully, medically and otherwise. Things appeared to be going without a hitch. They read my passport eagerly, their black eyes glancing up at me. Suddenly they handed it back.

" This passport is not in order. You must return."

I pointed out the special endorsement of their Minister, Dr. Don Casto Rojas. They had never heard of him. There was a certain formula in the matter of passport endorsements. The signature of the President himself would probably have counted for nothing. This was a time for "coming the heavy."

"Señores," I said coldly and haughtily. "His Excellency the Bolivian Ambassador to the Argentine is above all others. He endorsed my passport to afford me special facilities and ease my journey. This is a situation of great gravity. I regret that I shall have to do my duty and report defiance of his high authority."

They examined the passport anew and muttered darkly, but they were rattled. I was intensely sorry for them. Their minds had no reasoning powers. They had been told to look for Smith's signature and Brown's would not do. Probably they did not know they had an ambassador or what he did.

I produced my letter.

"Ah," they said. "Of course the letter will be delivered."

"Of course."

The American joined forces. The train showed signs of wanting to be on its way. The station-master shouted excitedly. "Señor Thompson—is there a Señor Thompson here?"

"Yes."

"Señor—there is a telegram from the railway chief,* sending you greetings, and saying we are to issue you a ticket to Atocha. There you will claim another ticket to La Paz."

That settled it. The young officials exchanged glances unhappily. The thing was obviously beyond their control. Annoying people like me, with all the wrong passes, were not specified in their rules, but they dared not stop me.

I leapt into the train with the American and turned into my sleeper to find the dark-haired pallid-faced creature reading my copy of *El Hogar*.

* Jefe.

"Do not mind me, señor. I am only doing my duty," she said. "We have to be very careful. It is war, and you have come from Paraguay."

"Not at all," I said politely. "Make yourself at home."

And I went to find the American and something in the nature of breakfast.

III. VALLEY OF TREASURE

By the time we had breakfasted the train had begun the 2,500 feet descent into the Tupiza valley, and at once the formlessness of the desert was gone. Slowly we crawled down the steep track, the train twisting like a snake so that always either its head or tail, or both, were in sight from the saloon windows; diving down between steep walls of purple and silver-veined rock, revealing sudden glimpses of valleys from which rugged, spiky crags reached up to us.

"It'll take us all day to cross this valley," said the American in his quiet voice. "We don't make Atocha before nine or ten to-night."

But time was an abomination in this valley: all time could not have been too much time. Yet, without Pat to see with me, to enjoy with me, it was anguish to hold all that I saw within me, to maintain a calm I did not feel, and I wrote a wild letter to her that served its purpose in the writing, and was never posted. She would have thought it mad.

As this great fissure in the desert of the Alti-Plano revealed itself I could not find coherent expression. I could only look and wonder. Great crags and spears of rock shone purple, bronze, gold, red, emerald and silver in the sun's light, so that at each turn and twist of the train new oubliettes gaped with their shining spears beneath us. And slowly the mountains grew up around us, and the train was like an insect crawling over their bulging spurs, that spread out like the roots of gigantic trees, down into the valley.

"These mountains are full of copper, iron, tin, silver and

gold. That's why they shine so!" said the American, and his voice held a quality of pride—as though this valley was a treasure he had not shared until now.

I was a child again, and here was a vivid childhood dream, but multiplied beyond all dreams, a dream that Monte Cristo had conjured, a dream of finding a great cave lined with jewels, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds. . . . And here it was; but so vast! a cave three hundred miles long, and carved with a grandeur beyond the power or conception of men.

It held us in awe. We didn't know which way to look, wishing to look all ways at once. And as we wound slowly along the floor of the valley the clear water of a river rippled like a shimmering silver scarf amongst the pepper trees, and the sleek cactus. Suddenly I said:

"But this valley is full of ruins—the ruins of some immense city—there are columns—there is a temple——"

The American laughed softly; gleefully.

"No man could build to this scale. Those pillars are three hundred feet high. That temple wall is a thousand feet——"

But he did not deny that they *were* columns; that they *were* temples. I wasn't seeing things in imagination. This city was fact; but it was a ruined city of God, fashioned through countless centuries. It was the inspiration of man's architecture.

Thick columns of rock, shining bronze and green and purple, stood up over the floor of the valley; buttresses of colossal proportions—that even appeared ornamented with gargoyles—made the mountains into cathedral walls, with spires, perfectly moulded, pricking the pale blue sky.

"It's all erosion," said the American. "Simply the action of water rushing down, dribbling down, through the ages."

But it was almost impossible to believe that this was *chance*—unless all things are chance. In the heart of the valley smaller columns, fluted and crowned, stood in orderly array. Looking down on us from the mountain walls were

giant sphinxes, sculptured by the ever-running waters, contoured by the softnesses in the rocks—but why should the softnesses and hardnesses contour them so? Or perhaps there were more misses than hits. It was useless to think. Here and there were mountain slopes with great thews and sinews of rock twisting down into the valleys, splaying out like giant feet holding small villages between the toes.

Slowly the valley grew more and more wonderful. Towers and turrets, buttresses and gargoyles, adorned the shining walls. And twice I saw the whole wall of a red mountain fluted like the pipes of an organ. It was as though this part of the valley was God's cathedral, and the mighty organ was pealing out to high heaven from high earth.

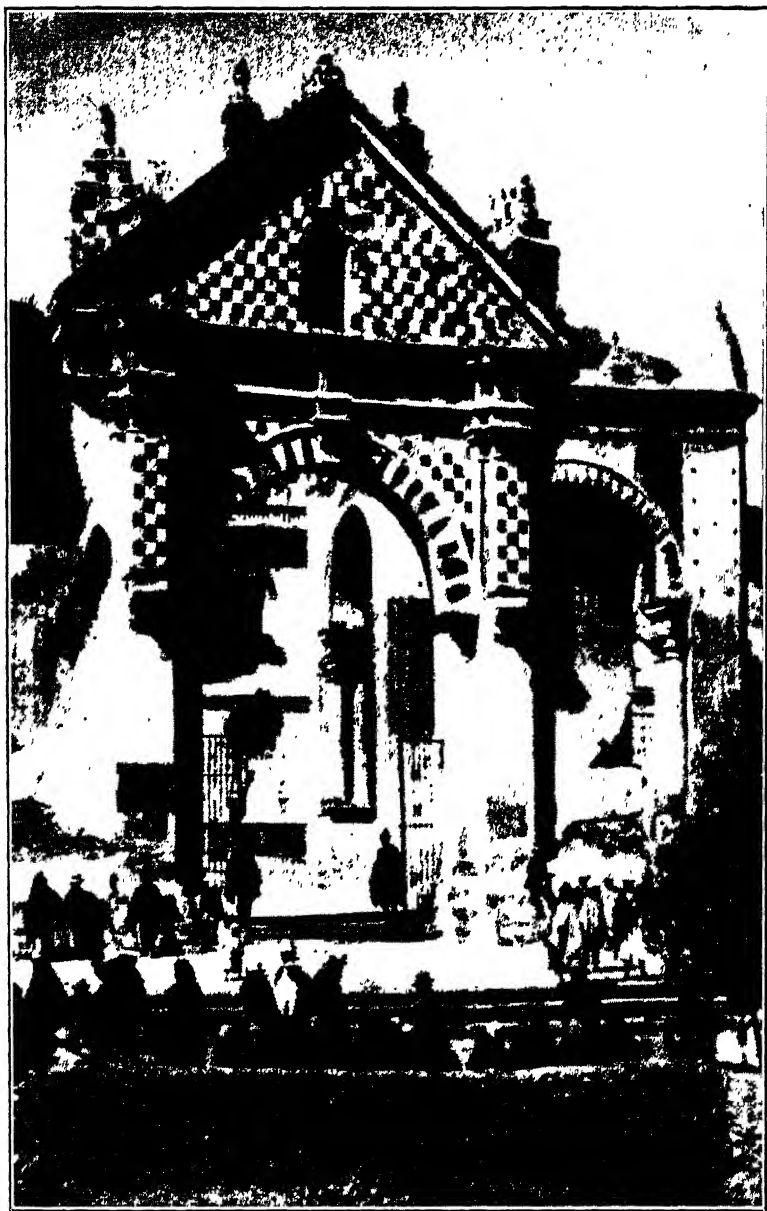
"I call that God's organ," said the American quietly, and there could be no other name for it.

I was not colouring these things with my imagination. There they were—cathedrals, organs, temples, turrets and towers gleaming gold, emerald, purple, bronze and silver in the sun. Cathedrals two thousand feet high, crowned with turrets and spires; organs as large as the walls of mighty mountains. . . .

All in this strange world fourteen thousand feet above the sea. We were Lilliputians, and there were Lilliputian towns and villages with red-roofed houses, and mosaic-façaded churches, amidst the pale green pepper trees. And in Tupiza we had time to wander, stretching our legs.

Fat, round-faced babies' faces crowned with knitted caps poked from brilliant coloured blankets on their mothers' backs, and often a thin amber stream would trickle from the blanket, leaving a tiny trail in the dust.

In Tupiza we seemed lifesize again in a world of normal dimensions, and then as we crawled again through the wild valley the vastness of God's architecture dwarfed us so that the herds of donkeys and stiff-necked llamas with their laden bales seemed midgets, and we, ourselves, ceased to have size, and were simply "eyes."



FAÇADED CHURCHES AMIDST PALE GREEN PEPPER TREES

It was dusk when we reached the distant end of the valley and began the long climb up to Atocha, and the desert that stretches unbroken to the great snow peaks of the Western Cordilleras. In the dying sun the rocks burst out in all the glory of their extravagant colour, and died to menacing dark walls through which we climbed slowly up and up over the peak of Escoriani.

At half-past nine—as the American had said—we were at Atocha, on the roof of the world again, and it was bitterly cold.

IV. MINERS

At each station on the long run from Tucuman the passing of the train had been an event drawing the inhabitants to look, comment and listen, and at Atocha there was an almost solid mass of humanity through which I had to struggle to the stationmaster's office to claim my promised ticket. Square-shouldered miners, their square-jawed heads framed in the fleecy collars of leather wool-lined jackets, greeted each other in crisp American accents above the heads of the dumpy Indians. Here and there groups of these broad jacketed figures split the surging tide of Indians like rocks in mid-stream.

I claimed my ticket, and was forcing my way back through the crowd when my American friend grabbed me into one of these groups.

"Meet Mr. Thompson—he's an English newspaper man—just come through from Paraguay."

A dozen strong hands gripped mine, and it was like being within a bubble of warmth, friendliness, and good fellowship.

"Let's get aboard," said one of the men. "Charles is travelling—Eddie's goin' through to La Paz—Look out for him at Chocaya——"

Odd scraps of information floated from group to group.

"They're off home, those two!"

"Come on, fellers—let's drink——"

Such friendly voices had not surrounded me since I had landed in South America. We filled up the saloon car, and ordered drinks and dice. I managed to observe in the ear of my American friend: "You said there weren't many Americans in Bolivia!"

"Too true," he answered, and a dozen American voices added confirmation earnestly: "You'll meet very few Americans up here. Plenty of your countrymen."

Half a dozen more miners filled the narrow gangway, greeting friends in the unmistakable accents of the United States. We drank whisky, and diced loudly.

"You'll be playin' Capitan in a day or two," said a miner who'd heroically partnered me. But I had beginner's luck.

Nobody paid for anything without shaking dice.

The crowds of men, the thick blue tobacco smoke, and a succession of whiskies, brought warmth to the stuffy saloon, and suddenly when the train began to move, and men tumbled over each other to the doors, shouting messages and good-byes, I felt cold.

"There's no pleasure in a metre-gauge railroad crossing the Uyuni desert," said the American. "Let's sit around and try to keep warm."

We sat around, but we didn't keep very warm. At midnight I went to my bunk, and in the intense cold I felt a trace of sickness, a quicker beat to my heart, and a vague need for more air. The dust of the desert caked the window, swirling up in grey clouds as we gathered speed. It would have been madness to open the window, anyhow. I put on extra socks, four pairs, and my overcoat and dressing gown over my clothes. I also stripped the top bunk of blankets and added them to my own.

"You've got to have a cabin to yourself across *Uyuni*," the American had said. "You'll need the blankets."

I did not sleep much that night. My nose, the only part of me outside the pile of clothes, was colder than an icicle. The temperature was well below zero. And as I lay

awake I had a clear picture of the green wilderness of the Chaco; the overpowering wet heat; the mosquitos and pulverins; and the blazing sun. But it didn't keep me warm—any more than thoughts of the Alti-Plano would keep the Bolivian Indians in the Chaco cool.

By morning a fog had worked up in my small cabin, and I struggled up to make the world visible through the opaque window glass. For a moment I wondered whether I was mad—or dead. Half excitedly I craned my head to get a view of the train, and seeing it, sat back and looked out over the broad placid stretch of Lake Poopo. I had thought that I was at sea.

The shimmering haze of water stretched to the horizon, and distantly the round mounds of rocks stood up, seeming in its midst, a haze obscuring their bases so that it seemed they floated.

I found the American cursing in the saloon.

"No calefaccion!" he was muttering, and blowing into his gloved hands. "Can you beat it! no heating on a journey like this——"

The startling wonder of the Tupiza valley had to be paid for—this desert guarding its doors.

While we drank mugs of steaming coffee a young American joined us. He had come aboard at Chocaya during the night.

"Meet Eddie Douglas," said my old acquaintance (it seemed that this journey had gone on and on, and Jujuy was away back in an unreal past).

We shook hands. Eddie Douglas was short and compact with a kind of half swaggering sturdiness. His face was lean, square jawed and tight mouthed, and his alert grey eyes were deep set. He talked with a slow warm accent, very sure, with a note of challenge.

We became good friends. Eddie was on his way home to Arizona after five years at Chocaya working in the *Siete Suyos** tin mine. The veins of Siete Suyos run into the ANIMAS

* Seven veins.

mine of Carlos Aramayo, but the tin has there become silver.

"You always get that," said Eddie. "The tin works out to silver, or the silver to tin."

He loved his job, but he was like a schoolboy in his glee to be going home, his small suitcase stuffed with "bills." "Just a few jobs to do for the boys in La Paz—buying things—then off this Alti-Plano——"

Eddie's grey eyes lit with pictures of Arizona. . . . "Off this Alti-Plano——"

To a man who has worked there during five long years it must seem almost impossible to go back to the world again.

All that day, except for odd patches where the ground was rimed white with salt, the grey desert made a changeless landscape for our eyes. At times there would be small mouse-coloured villages, and now there was the shallow bed of the Desaguadero river winding over the plain, almost waterless, from Lake Titicaca to Lake Poopo, falling five hundred feet in its course. And as I searched the blank skyline hungrily (what right had I to be hungry with Eddie sitting there with his five year old appetite!) for sight of a mountain peak the American miner told me how this great desert had happened.

Once, centuries of centuries back in time, the chain of the Eastern Cordilleras had faced the Western Cordilleras across a giant valley fifty, sixty, seventy—who knows how many—thousand feet deep. And slowly the snows, the winds, the rains, the everlasting washing down from the mountain peaks began to fill up the valley so that through the centuries the floor had slowly climbed the mountain walls, and the peaks of the Cordilleras, feeding this vast floor, had lowered. For millions of years this slow filling up process has been going on, until now there is the great level floor, fourteen thousand feet up from the sea, and the peaks of the Cordilleras barely ten thousand feet above it. So it continues—perhaps the work of a thousand years is not measurable—until at last the peaks will be gone, and this vast floor will have risen higher, simply a desert at the top of the world.

How high the mountains were, God alone knows; how much higher the Alti-Plano will rise before it absorbs them seems also God's province.

Two or three times during the day we stopped at stations, and at times we stopped for no apparent reasons. "Perhaps," said Eddie, "the driver's bored. Perhaps he wants a quiet smoke. You don't have to worry up here."

Once when we had stopped an Indian dropped his trousers and squatted out on the bare plain unselfconsciously doing what my excellent housekeeper would term "his necessities," and staring at us idly with his soft cowlike eyes.

Great herds of llamas ran from the train's approach, stopping at a distance, heads poised indignantly on long necks. Near the villages there were always herds of llamas and donkeys all heavily laden and driven by Indians.

"They're queer beasts,"* said Eddie. "They'll carry fifty kilos and if you stick on an extra gramme they lie down under it, and refuse to budge an inch."

The llama is the staff of life on the Alti-Plano; the beast of burden; the food; the clothing; even its dung is fuel." On hand looms the women weave their wonderful rugs and blankets, dying them with natural dyes.

And I thought, as the day unfolded the wonders of this place, here is a film for Bob Flaherty—a "Man of Aran" picture that would thrill the audiences of the western world.

At Oruro, the mining centre of Bolivia, a great crowd of Americans swamped us out, shouting their chaff and greetings, ragging Eddie, all tumbling over each other to stand him drinks and give their "chins" to Uncle Sam.

"Eddie," I said, when I got him alone, "what's all this boloney about there not being Americans up here? The place is stiff with 'em."

Eddie's voiced challenged in reply: "You're making a mistake. Practically no Americans out here. Plenty of English."

* When a llama is tired nothing will make it get up. They are of the camel tribe and have an unpleasant habit of spitting very accurately.

I shrugged. Eddie was dead serious. Some sort of tradition, I supposed, and left it at that.

A few miners stayed in the train when we left Oruro and told me of the vast wealth of *Siglo XX**. This great mine at Llallagua supports 10,000 men, the largest tin mine in the world.

"Get this," said a miner. "Patiño mines boss this country. Simon Patiño's income makes the whole revenue of Bolivia look silly."

That was interesting in view of accusations against Standard Oil of financing the war.

"They say Standard Oil ran the war," I ventured.

At once the Americans grew cautious.

"We don't talk of the war," they said. "Wiser not. But that's boloney. Patiño's taxes would pay for the war without anything else."†

I began to realize the colossal wealth of this country, and how unnecessary it was for any outside influence to finance her. There was, too, I learned, a good deal of communistic feeling bred by the wealth of Simon Patiño, and aggravated by the fact that he chose to live in Paris. But surely it would be impossible in any other country for a single man to own by inheritance tracts of land that made his income larger than the national budget.

It was almost impossible to get the Americans to discuss the war. All they would say, rather half-heartedly, was:

"We think Bolivia's right, of course——"

It was a contrast to Paraguay where every man, American or English, was a word warrior for his adopted country.

V. THE HIDDEN CITY

If ever I have appeared sophisticated it has been a pose. There have been times when I have been ashamed of myself

* Twentieth century.

† There are exciting stories of how Sr. Don Simon Patiño financed Bolivia to fight Paraguay. The stories are nonsense. Simon Patiño paid his taxes, and his excess war taxes, like everyone else. His excess taxation was, of course enormous. But that has nothing to do with it.

pretending to see new things, to live a moment of "ordinary" life, without a thrill. For life is never "ordinary" to me. At such times I have been temporarily overcome by the blasé erudition of my companions, and my spirits have been at a low ebb. I seldom allow my delight to be dominated, but it is useless to deny that a great deal of my joy in anything is that another enjoys it with me. I don't want to talk (a cry will leap from Pat as she reads these proofs), I want to look, hear, smell, without the necessity of appearing bored. I do not see any merit in boredom assumed.

Had I been alone in that train across the Alti-Plano I should have suffered greatly from the kind of anguish that induced me to write wildly to Pat. I should have sat silent, a voiceless man striving for articulation. Had I been with a crowd of twenty-year-old sophisticates I might have wallowed in shame. As it was I was with Americans. It was my first contact with Americans apart from an occasional acquaintance, and I shall always like them. I don't know whether these miners of the Alti-Plano are representative of their race—it seems hardly likely—but to me they are. When I think of Americans I think first of Eddie Douglas, his eternal "cigarros," his crisp, dry "pouter pigeon" manner, his easy good nature, his damn good fellowship, and, perhaps, most of all, his complete lack of sophistication. You always knew where you stood with Eddie Douglas. He was a real person. You have to be a real person if life has made you a miner on the Bolivian Andes. All the Americans I met up there were real men—I don't mean "brave"; I don't mean "he-men"; I mean they were real people. They were savages, white savages, lacking the petty falsenesses of drawing-rooms and civilization. And naturally they were children in their spontaneity and simple delights.

I did not find all this out in the train that ran with a dozen stops from Oruro to Viacha, and thence to La Paz. I didn't find it out expressly until this minute (and maybe I haven't now.)

As I sat opposite Eddie Douglas in the narrow saloon of the

Bolivian train, and shook dice onto the dusty table top, I felt a sense of release. I could be myself without reserve. There was no need for pretence. Eddie delighted in all he saw. He delighted in the abominable cigar the attendant had sold him for three Bolivianos.* He delighted in the grey desert simply because it was a different piece of desert from that which he had walked, worked and lived upon for five years. He was a small boy released from school, but a man-size small boy with a man-size delight.

Every minute or two he craned his neck to give his grey eyes, narrowed against the glare, a good sight of the horizon. His eyes were deep sunk under the ledges of his brows, and his teeth bit on the black cigar in his small straight mouth.

He would still the dice in the leather *cancha* poised to throw.

"Say—can't you see 'em yet—those snow caps?"

"We should be seeing 'em any time now," said the American quietly. "Shake those dice, Eddie."

At the table across from us a Chilean officer with a gold identification disc on a gold chain around his lean black-haired wrist was boasting loudly to two Bolivian staff officers.

"I have a wife and three children in Santiago," he said. "I haven't seen them for three years." His face was lean, dark and beaky, his eyes smoky, and his mouth had a loose curl to it. "I was with the first in the Chaco. Now I am just out of the line. I do that for Bolivia. I give up my wife and my three children."

The Bolivians listened politely, their soft eyes wide, but expressionless. They knew he didn't care a damn about his wife and children. But he was a guest. Rather more than a guest.

"That sort don't get killed," I said to Eddie. "Pity. Damned swine leaves his wife and kids to fight for another country."†

"You married men!" said Eddie. He pursed his lips and

* Boliviano par equals 1 peso Argentine. At that time 5 Bolivianos equalled 1 peso.

† The Chilean, of course, spoke Spanish.

stared thoughtfully at his cigar. "A man shouldn't have a wife up here. Hell of a life——"

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "Every man ought to have a wife. It makes life right."

"These *cholos* serve," said a man with a wide wool-lined collar standing up high behind his head. "They like it. They don't get insulted. My little girl comes along twice a week. Into the bath! I tell her. And in she jumps. Always give her a bath first."

"Yes, and you can have a change now and then," said another man. "They're good these *cholos*."

"But that's not the same as a wife," I said. "You ought to have wives—not just put sexual intercourse down on the housekeeping, two deliveries a week kind of business. Besides a woman's a better companion than a man for all the time. They see things differently, so that you see everything twice and get more than twice the joy out of life."

"You're lucky!" said Eddie bitterly.

And I knew Eddie wanted a wife. He was on his way home to Arizona. It was tempting him, I knew, to bring a wife back.

"D'you really think a man should bring a wife up here?" he said. He leaned across the table, and took the cigar from his mouth.

"Yes I do, Eddie. Life's in your mind. It doesn't matter a damn where you live. A man without a wife is less than half a man. Life's not just bathing girls and taking them to bed."

"That's good though," said the miner with the woollen collar.

"Of course it's good—but it's only a bit of it. The bit you can get anywhere."

Eddie was brooding.

"I'm going out on the car platform. I want to see these snow caps. . . . Oh, boy, they'll make you jump—you've never seen such mountains!"

I followed him to the swaying platform between the cars. We climbed down the steel steps, and linked our arms through the rail, leaning out. The grey shining desert rushed under our eyes.

"Look——" said Eddie. "Look. . . . Oh, boy! there she is—*Sajama*. She's perfect."

It was hard to separate the perfect cone of *Sajama* from the pale horizon. I stared, and gradually I saw the mountain, a pale steely white outline in a pale sky, rising out of the desert.

"Seen her!" said Eddie. He was thrilled. So was I. "She's a hundred miles off—every bit," said Eddie.

We stood swaying with the train on the lowest steps, the icy wind tearing at our faces. I felt warm and tingling.

"*Huayna Potosi* directly," said Eddie. "She's a grand mountain too. Snow line's seventeen thousand feet. They're all over twenty thousand."

It was queer to think that we were in the tropics up here.

We went back to the car, and sat alone drinking coffee. Eddie told me the stories he had heard of the mountains. "You should see *Potosi*," he said. "It's like a rabbit warren. Claims go in horizontal, not vertical. When you come to another claim you go under or over."

He told me how the Spaniards had got everywhere. "You think you've found a new vein," he said. "It's miles from any place. Maybe you're up at seventeen thousand feet, cold as hell, hard on the lungs. Then you find those old Spaniards got there first."

We brooded on that; how they might have done it, all those years ago; the guts they must have had, those old Spaniards.

The great chain of the Cordilleras grew in the sky, pale, hardening to steely blue. *Illimani*, *Illampu*, *Huayna Potosi*, *Sajama*. We sat and gaped at them.

Eddie said: "That *Illimani*—have you ever seen anything like her! She's a grand mountain."

And alongside the perfect shape of *Illimani* was the great

flat slightly sloping roof of Illampu, a few feet lower. They are two giants, the Indians say, and when they were growing it was a race between them, who should be the tallest. They were head to head not an inch in it. Then Illimani blew, and blew Illampu's head off. That's how she got that flat top just as if it had been sliced off with a butter knife.

At last we stretched our legs at Viacha, and the desert was almost at an end. Already we could see the great rent gaping away from the foot of Illimani to the edge of the Alti-Plano. We were too excited to sit quietly in our seats when the train began to move on the last part of its journey. We stood on the lowest steps of the car platforms shouting at each other across the gap between the jolting platforms. The engine belched a trail of dark-brown smoke across the sky so that through it we could see Illimani, the smoke acting as a filter. And presently we saw the huge effigy of Christ, arms outstretched in blessing at the very rim of the canyon. But the city was still invisible.

We stopped awhile at Alto before going down into the valley. A few Americans left the train, and went down swiftly by the motor road, while the train circled and looped its five mile course to drop twelve hundred feet. The valley lengthened swiftly, bursting to life with red roofs, white walls, splashes of red, yellow, green bordering the white tape of the road leading to Obrajes. Small houses seemed to cling to the walls of the valley, and all at once La Paz was there beneath us, hidden against the steep wall of the Alto; a city of 150,000 souls, its houses like red roofed mushrooms in a field; its streets, narrow channels, seeming flat, but climbing steeply; its plazas, oases of trees and brilliant shrubs.

For an hour (it may have been less) as we plunged and circled downwards the city grew before our eyes, losing its illusion, while Eddie, as proud as a mother, pointed out buildings he knew, and the La Paz river galloping through the streets.

And Illimani towered in magnificence as we descended, her

vast sleek snow-covered cheeks closing the valley to the very sky.

"We'll stick together," said Eddie. "My kid can handle our stuff."

Eddie's kid was a hulk of a lad with flaming red hair and lashless blue eyes in a ruddy face. "He's a bright kid," said Eddie. "An Irishman's mistake. He'll never forget you."

Our suitcases hung about the youth's shoulders, serving him well as bumpers as he forged a passage through the mass of people crowding the station. We clambered into an American car, the "kid" hanging on the step.

"Strangers' Club," said Eddie, and we bumped down into the town.

There were no signs of the poverty that had been a blight upon Asuncion. Brand new American cars zoomed swiftly up and down the steep streets.

"Just shows you," said Eddie darkly. But I didn't gather just what it showed.

"How do you think they get all these new autos?" I didn't know.

We panted up the stairs of the Strangers' Club, only to pant down again. Two Air Mail pilots would be leaving in the morning if we could come back. We didn't.

We circled the Plaza Murillo happily, and chanced the Paris Hotel facing the Palace and the old Cathedral, across the gardens of the Square.

"We're not here for life, Eddie," I said. "Not worth changing over."

They gave us a large room with two beds, and a kind of ante-chamber large enough for our morning coffee and rolls (though Eddie consumed huge quantities of eggs and bacon). For this princely suite, excluding the eggs and bacon, the charge was eleven bolivianos a day; roughly, with the exchange as happy for me as in Paraguay, one shilling each. I was considerably heartened. So far I had not spent more than twenty of my precious stock of pesos. And I was there anyway.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE WARPATH

I. LA PAZ

It was dark by the time Eddie and I wandered out into the Plaza Murillo. The sky was hard cobalt blue in which the stars sat like diamonds. The air was crisp and rare, so that we puffed out our chests, taking deep gulps. But the need for more air had not yet become pressing, a thing of urgency.

The steep streets twinkled with lights, and curved around, about, beneath and above us like phosphorescent tea-leaves in a tea-cup, and far above, detached alike from the lights of earth and heaven, a faint gleam of white made a halo at the head of the Christ standing on the dark lip of the desert.

"I'll get along to the Strangers' Club," said Eddie. "There'll be a good crowd of fellers. Good luck."

I watched him dive down by the side of the cathedral, and stood a moment feeling magnificently alone, strong and free, under that grand sky, letting my whole journey pour past me to this moment. If Pat had been with me I should have been pleased with myself.

The Captain of the Palace Guard provided a soldier to escort me to the home of the President, and together we marched along the steep streets. The young Indian soldier wore the green uniform of Bolivia awkwardly, and seemed bewildered. He had the number of the President's house on a piece of paper, and muttered it ceaselessly, slanting his large frightened eyes up to the numbers on the houses.

"Is this the street?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Very well, I will find the house."

He was relieved to be dismissed, and turned about, clumping heavily back to the Palace. At the top of a wide flight of stone steps leading up from the President's front door a young officer received me in the best German military manner. His heels clicked smartly, and his bow was stiff from the waist. His jack boots shone like black glass. From shoulder to neck two gold cords looped and hung in golden tassels. In all Paraguay I had not seen such soldierly magnificence. I stated my business and was escorted to a winter garden. It seemed that I was expected, for within two minutes the President came towards me smiling a welcome, drawing me down beside him on a wicker settee as we shook hands.

Two or three gold-braided officers lurked amongst the potted palms and shrubs just out of earshot.

"So you've come from Paraguay to have a look at us," said the President. His eyes flickered over me. "Welcome. Consider my home as your own."

I thanked him warmly. He had the manner of an Englishman, and spoke without trace of an accent. President Ayala had spoken English which could be called perfect in a foreigner. President Tejada Sorzino might have been an Englishman. A smile was constant around his mouth; a smile that suggested he would laugh very easily—at anything. But I judged that his fleshy face would stiffen on occasion, and become almost brutal. His heavy face made his eyes seem small.

We talked of trivialities. He said he was pleased with me for coming to his country. He asked me amusedly if I hadn't felt frightened about coming, and I asked him just as amusedly why I should. But I found we were talking mainly with our eyes, and our spoken words had little to do with what we were saying.

"You must see as much as possible, and get to know us. My son will show you round. We are entirely at your service," he said, and assumed a fatherly manner that fitted him well and set me entirely at my ease.

"Now get along to bed. You need rest," and he came with me to the stair-head, saying good-bye.

I realized, as I walked alone towards the Strangers' Club, that I had had vague fears of unpleasantness, and felt relieved. Several people had warned me to watch my step, but there was nothing to fear. The only thing that upset me at all at that moment was that I should probably make enemies of these Bolivians. President Tejada Sorzino had really made me feel that I could wander into his home at will and take pot luck.

I found Eddie propping up the bar in the Strangers' Club, all set for a good time, and no good time in sight. A poker game seemed a forlorn hope, a rubber of bridge insufficiently exciting. There was some special "do" on somewhere, and the "boys" were missing. I felt it was a good thing. An early night was clearly my ticket even if Eddie was straining on the holiday leash.

We went to bed. I think I slept for about an hour that night. It was the first of many sleepless nights that reduced me to skeleton measurements. I was conscious of my heart beating in my ears; and shortness of breath, while not being urgent, had become annoying. I just couldn't get it in satisfying quantities.

That first night should have been a warning to take things easily, but it wasn't. One sleepless night hadn't made me feel any the worse for wear, and I dashed out with Eddie immediately after breakfast to explore La Paz and the market.

Swarms of boot boys surged around us the moment we showed ourselves. They came running across from the Plaza, shouting and waving their arms, and two of them anchored us to their wooden blocks while we let the blue smoke of our tobacco (Eddie always smoked cigars) trace patterns in the still air.

Suddenly Eddie let out a full-throated yelp of greeting.

"Waal—Son of a gun!"

His chest puffed out, his thumbs tucked in his arm holes, his mouth twisted round his cigar.

Ten yards away, coming towards us across the square, was a tall, large-jointed, loose-limbed (truly) American with jaws that bulged like the spinach-eating sailor's.

"Waal—Son of a gun!" barked this new arrival. "What you doin' 'round here, Eddie?"

Not before had I seen two American Sons of Guns greet each other. There was a period of mutual appraisal. They looked each other up and down, round and about, coughing out exclamations of incredulity, chaff, good-natured insult, ending suddenly in a mighty hand-clasp, and the production from unsuspected pockets of cigars wrapped in cellophane.

After this the two stood away a few feet and barked short comments at each other—"Huh—Waal—I'll say——"

It was all very "Old Timer" and "Life in the Alaska Snows," but it was clearly genuine. The second son of a gun was the American Vice-Consul, a good man to know around those parts, and he couldn't have done more for me had I been a United States citizen.

"A pal of Eddie's," he said, and his jaws bulged so that I judged his pipe stem must have been made of high-speed steel—for it didn't splinter—and that kind of set the seal on difficulties that might occur with local authorities.

I figured (even to think of this period makes me think American) that if a few more of Eddie's old-timer pals were abroad on the sunlit streets it would be a bad day for our shopping in the market. But scarcely a garment of the western world disturbed the brilliant colours daubing the streets of La Paz. There was none of the poverty so striking in Asuncion. Fat native women, smiling faced, squatted over the market streets amidst their wares; their brilliant shawls, blankets, and multitudinous skirts, and their hard white hats, splashing the narrow cobbled slopes with vivid banks of colour against the stone and plaster walls of low-roofed buildings.

It was a wild riot of disorder, of jabber, bartering, movement, and up and down we strode like two American sailors on shore leave, in and out of the open-fronted shops. Necklaces of multi-coloured beads, saddlery, voluminous bloomers, soft brown furs, vicuña, shawls, bonnets, blankets, bundles of coca leaves, excited our eyes, our fingers, our desires.

In every shop, with every market woman squatting broad and fat as Buddha, I would have liked to spend my precious pesos. Instead I "helped" Eddie. We bargained, we haggled, exchanged good-natured obscenities, laughed and bought at a dozen stalls. The blankets claimed our best attention. They were of llama wool wonderfully woven in queer designs, red, yellow, green, blue, and a vile shade of pink that I have hated ever since I drank a glass of sherbet of the same shade at the age of four and was promptly sick. All these colours woven into the shapes of birds with blue bodies, pink wings, green legs, red tails, birds of all shapes, sizes and impossibilities.

Eddie bought a dozen of these rugs at thirty bolivianos a time, and I could not resist one that lacked the awful pink motif, and some hats, and a strip of vicuña, all for less than ten pesos Argentine.

We had terrific joy in that market. We tramped up and down a dozen streets, in and out of small dark shops selling every conceivable article, and laughter was spontaneous on each Indian's lips. The fat Bolivianos laughed as they cursed, laughed all the time. Their faces are made for laughter, and for child-like lowering scowls.

Often Eddie's offers refused at the first attempt were accepted on the second or third. Voices shrilled at us as we made our way—"Señores Americanos, veinte bolivianos—only twenty!"

"Next time round!" called Eddie, and by then the price sometimes sank to eighteen or fifteen.

Often the market women from whom we were purchasing indulged in magnificent vituperation with would-be wooers of

their customers. But it was always good-natured. At the climax of invective the combatants seldom shifted from their broad haunches or ruffled a shawl.

Meanwhile, after an hour or two of this mountain crawling—for the streets were on a gradient of one in two, or three—we had collected a troop of small boys to bear our burdens. They marched solemnly ahead of us submerged in blankets, hats, pots and pans—Eddie had promised to buy a couple of dozen saucepans and frying pans for the miners at Chocaya—or stood importantly sharing in the splendour of Eddie's bank roll as he peeled a few notes from a slab as thick as a brick.

It was a happy morning for all concerned. Money had depreciated equally with the Paraguayan peso, and brought its hardships. But life is a hard business in Bolivia at the best of times, and Eddie's spending must have filled a few bellies.

We dawdled slowly upwards out of the market, breathing quickly and without satisfaction. I remember swearing to myself that I would have a siesta and take things easy for the rest of the day. I had been a fool, but I wouldn't have missed that market for anything.

"Well, it's rest for me, Eddie," I said. "I don't live up here."

"Aw—you'll be O.K.," said Eddie. "My heart beat around a hundred and thirty for the first twelve months, and she's over the hundred now. That's normal up here. Take it easy this afternoon."

But that was easier said than done. Our Vice-Consul showed up with the last mouthful of lunch, and we were whisked away to the Chijini club to meet the "crowd."

II. THE SOCIAL WHIRL

Wherever I went in La Paz I met Americans, most of them connected with mines, all assuring me that there were very few Americans in Bolivia. La Paz was thick with new



BOLIVIAN WOMAN AND CHILD

American cars, and again I heard vague references to "graft," but I didn't find out just how the graft worked, or whether it was graft.

The few English people were mainly railway men and, because of their poor pay, were much quieter than their better paid American cousins. Few of the Englishmen could afford to play poker—Englishmen aren't really made for poker anyway—although no one appeared to consider Bolivian currency in terms of real money. Most of them were being paid in real U.S. dollars or sterling. A man would say "I dropped a thousand bills last night" in much the same tone as Grandma might comment that she lost a few seashells at rummy. No one seemed to care how many bills they dropped, or translated them into U.S. dollars or sterling.

Together with their wives the Americans and English in La Paz made up a good-sized colony; and a kind of "Poona" atmosphere, seeming inescapable in outposts where whites live with their womenfolk, pervaded the clubs. The social whirl whirled in much the same manner as it does in an English suburb, except that whites abroad are invariably top-layer, whatever they might have been at home, and a little theatrical in consequence. Wives played bridge, gave tea parties, and gossiped. Husbands performed a reasonable imitation of golf on a grassless slab of desert up at Alto on the heights above the city. There were also a few hardy souls who played lawn tennis in a quiet way—for no other way is advisable at 12,000 feet above the sea. And most drank as much as was good for them, played poker into the small hours, and gossiped.

The social whirl revolved around the Chijini and Strangers' Clubs, the consulates, and private homes, and I met more or less everyone at once as the guest of the U.S. Vice-Consul at Chijini. It was a pleasant little club high up on one of the steepnesses of La Paz. A bowling green was in course of improvement; croquet was in full swing; a bar, dart board, and a large lounge for teas and what not, made up the place,

and represented a sturdy effort on the part of some of the exiles. I found it pleasant to lounge drinking tea, and to listen to the local gossip. It struck me very forcibly that no one was anxious to talk of the war, and only very guardedly would they have the smallest of views prised out of them.

"Bolivia's right, of course——" But the voices didn't hold an "of course" note. Very few of them seemed to have much idea of the Chaco or of what the trouble was about. Yet in Bolivia there was a great deal of propaganda, whereas in Asuncion there had been very little.

"It's best to keep our opinions to ourselves," said a middle-aged miner. It was a pity from my point of view because different opinions might prove helpful in assessing the facts the President and Ministers would shoot off at me.

We slipped from Chijini down to the Strangers' Club about seven in the evening and, the wives being absent, things livened up. Wives abroad, even more so than in England, live entirely separate lives from their husbands, and appear to like it. We diced for drinks, we diced for dinners, and but for the U.S. Vice-Consul who partnered me in capitan—or rather capitan-ed me—I should have been badly down the drain. Bluff is a science with Americans, with me it's just a game, and a costly one. I'm a good card player and a bad bluffer. The U.S. Vice-Consul tried to take me in hand.

"You've got to know when to bluff. You'll never win at capitan or poker——"

"I'm sure I won't," I agreed. I just don't know when to bluff, and I can't just sit quietly winning or losing a little. I had seen poker in Australia played for real money, but it hadn't cured me. It was not until I had watched these Americans that I felt safe. If I play poker in the future it will be with my grandmother, and I daresay she'll win all my sea shells.

It was after two when I left Eddie chewing on his third cigar and pushing out bundles of chips onto the baize with a rhythmic movement that looked as if it might go on indef-

initely, and yawned my way quietly to bed. When Eddie came in at five I hadn't closed an eyelid.

Any guide book will tell you to rest, lay off drinks, and behave as if you were ninety-four or so. The guide books know what they're talking about. For two days I was going to die. My nose bled most of the time, and my stomach seemed constantly anxious to dispense with its lining. I thought of Pat in Buenos Aires, and worked out who would give her a hand to get back to England, and cursed myself for leaving her with a couple of children and no cash. I refuse to think about the self-pitying misery of those two days. I remember crawling up to the railway office with some mad idea of getting back to Pat, getting off those mountains at any price. But the result was not comforting. It only served to accentuate the appalling isolation of La Paz from the normal ordinary world. It would take a week at least, a week of days and nights all full of hours and minutes, to see even Jujuy again, and its maddening cactus; a day more to see the plains, and breathe air.

But, of course, I wasn't dying. I was just enjoying soroche and it served me right. It is better to behave like ninety-four willingly for a couple of days than feel like a hundred and fifty-four for three unwillingly.

An oldish man buttonholed me as I sat sipping a soft drink in the Strangers' Club, and accentuated urgently:

"You can't think straight up here. We're all a little mad. They ought to move the Government down to Sucre. They'd have no more wars——" He shook his head, and moved away, glancing back at me over his shoulder. "Too high——much too high."

It seemed to me that he spoke the wisdom of Solomon, and now, safely down at sea level, I think he put Bolivia's troubles in a nutshell. Life has different meanings at such an altitude. I couldn't think straight, anyway, during those two days of my soroche. I had only one thought in my mind: to get back to Pat. And that was impossible.

On the evening of the second day I had a quiet talk with the President, and felt better.

"You didn't go to bed and take things easy," he chided. "You'll be fine to-morrow, but you must learn to go slow: We don't make old bones up here—fifty is quite old."*

And the next day, although I still couldn't sleep more than an hour or two, life began to quicken in me. An urge to find things out took hold of me again, and I trudged quietly about my business.

III. TRACKING DOWN THE FACTS

As soon as I felt fit I arranged an appointment with the railway chief, realizing from my Paraguayan experiences that I should probably learn most from this source. Nothing much of importance escapes the railway chiefs of these countries.

I wanted to feel strong, with my wits in good shape, before plunging into the war business, examinations of technical documents, and arguments with ministers.

J. A. Pickwood, the general manager of the British-owned Bolivia-Antofagasta Railway in La Paz, was the sort of man I should have expected to meet tramping across corn stubble, a 12-bore in the crook of a large meaty arm, and a rabbit or two bulging the capacious pockets of a farmer's buff-coloured coat. He had a wide open ruddy face, jolly and smiling, and there was a keenness in his eyes and a breadth of forehead that made me respect his words. I think it would have been difficult to make this hearty railwayman say anything he did not mean.

There was a good deal of jealousy about J. A. Pickwood in La Paz, and I'd heard it said—rather spitefully—that he'd

*I have read in several English newspapers recently that Bolivians are noted for their longevity, and that there are many in the nineties. I should like to see their birth certificates. Perhaps their year is six months. The inquirers responsible for the statements must have found a great many people who felt ninety.

been in hot water, and had nearly been kept out of Bolivia after his holiday in Europe on account of outspoken remarks in the time of Salamanca. He was a little too English to appeal to Americans. They thought him a snob, but you can't be the leading man in small communities for the best part of twenty-five years without knowing it.

He greeted me warmly, asking how was his old friend Cooper in Asuncion—he had been Cooper's senior in Pernambuco more years ago than I've been in the world. He was an easy man to talk with, and took the stress out of me that the two or three days of inactivity and sickness had created.

I raised the question of his trouble with Salamanca at once. "No one seems inclined to talk war," I said. "I'm here to talk war. They say you've been in trouble——"

Although Pickwood had good cause to dislike Salamanca he took no pleasure in condemning the war dictator of Bolivia. He spoke unwillingly, but I learned that Salamanca, as much as any man, had been responsible for the war. He had climbed to power on a definite war policy, built up the army and armaments, and instituted the penetration into Chaco territory and the building of counter forts.

President Tejada Sorzino, Vice-President under Salamanca, had worked ceaselessly for peace, and was a good friend of Pickwood. I think that just at that time the railway chief and the government were hand in glove. Pickwood had become a very important man indeed, and had a voice in the general affairs of the country.

This first meeting with the railway chief not only cheered me up, but gave me a groundwork of the situation that I had lacked. But he would not incriminate Bolivia.

"Bolivia couldn't move any troops without my knowledge," he told me. "Villazon is on the route to the Chaco, and I can tell you that there were only 1,900 Bolivian troops in the Chaco at the outbreak."

"You should tell that to Cooper!" I said laughing.

I could not agree with his statement. Bolivians had been

penetrating into the Chaco—on their own admission—for many years, and numbers could have entered from the frontier territory. On the other hand it is clear from the railway manager's statement that there could not have been a movement of the main army—the 80,000 trained men Bolivia had ready in 1932.

Pickwood then gave me these figures for troops carried during 1933 and 1934. A very small number had returned from the Chaco, and these were also included. From these figures one can form an idea of the numbers engaged, and the possible casualties.

1933	Officers and men	82,918
1934	„	„	.	.	.	123,388

“ I'll come to you with a flock of questions as soon as the Ministers have given me something to chew on,” I warned him. “ Then, if you don't mind, we can have another discussion. Meanwhile what about Standard Oil? The world is sure it's an oil war, and S.O.C.O.B. in the devil's part.”

Pickwood laughed really heartily. “ Stuff and nonsense—absolute stuff and nonsense ! ” He roared. “ Bolivia thought that Standard Oil *should* help, but Carlos Aramayo got a point blank refusal when he put it up to them.”

I had already learned enough to know that this was probably true. Taxation was as heavy in Bolivia as in Paraguay, and the yield from the wealthy American and local companies was enormous. Whereas in Paraguay the railway was one of the largest and most powerful companies, in Bolivia the railway, though much greater and wealthier, was a comparatively small affair. The railway had something like 9,000,000 Bolivianos (roughly \$500,000 U.S. May 1935) held up in the country and Patiño's had sums running into millions of U.S. dollars.

Wherever I went accusations against Standard Oil were ridiculed by Americans and English, and representatives of the company itself. I went to the President and said:

" I want to prove that the Standard Oil Company have not helped Bolivia. So far I haven't found much else to say in your favour, but I might be able to destroy that accusation."

The President lent me his son, Tejada Flores,* and we got to work. Pickwood had spoken very highly of young Tejada, and I found him a charming companion. Owing to the war he had been recalled from his studies at a Californian Technical College to do his " bit " in the Chaco, and had lost two or three valuable years thereby.

I heard from English and American sources that he had been voted the most popular student in his U.S.A. college—a triumph for any foreigner, even one as unforeign as Tejada Flores proved to be. He was becoming a brilliant electrical engineer, and there would be immense scope for him in Bolivia in peace. I didn't feel that he was foreign at all. He had a slight American accent, and we talked naturally, too naturally at times. I was apt to forget that he was a Bolivian, and say—" Oh what the hell do you make of this ruddy war ! "

But he discussed the whole situation without the least show of cant, and listened patiently to all my arguments, answering as best he could. But neither Tejada Flores, nor anyone else I met in Bolivia, had an answer to the question why Bolivia waited sixty years to state her claims.

Without Tejada to help me I don't think I should have found out very much in the time I had, and I should probably have been found wandering over the Alti-Plano with straw in my hair. The amount of fuddle and mañana in a South American country makes the methods of British red tape breath-taking in speed. It might have been impossible to meet and discuss the situation with the Ministers and explore the confidential records. Also there were no fewer than eleven sets of officials, war, police, and secret service organizations, keeping track of me.

* In Bolivia the mother's name is taken by the children. The President's mother's name was Sorzino, his wife's Flores.

Tejada Flores eased all this. The fact that he was with me acted as a charm, and he had my passport endorsed so thoroughly that it looked as if I had been on a world tour.

Together we visited the Ministers in turn. I found I was able to speak a good deal more frankly than I had expected, and although there were awkward moments occasionally I don't think there was ever the least danger.

I used to say: "Tell me something new about the Chaco. Help me to believe Bolivia isn't all to blame."

They couldn't. They argued fiercely about who fired the first shot. Nobody knew, and it wouldn't have anything to do with it if they did. That and history constituted their argument. It wouldn't do.

But they didn't turn nasty. "Not only," they said, "are you the only newspaper correspondent to have come to us from the other side of the Chaco, but you tell us that we're wrong. . . . You English!"

I found the War Minister more concerned to convince me that Bolivia was still full of fight than to bother about the rights and wrongs of the business. He presented me to the tall, hawk-faced, General Quintinilla, imposing and soldierly in his military cape.

We studied maps. The plan of campaign was explained to me carefully. They talked earnestly, but they knew I knew. I liked them more and more. I had longings to smash the diplomatic atmosphere, and say—"Let's forget it—you know. I know——"

"Our retreat to Villa Montes was a pre-arranged plan. The morale of our troops and the organization is perfect," said the dark-faced minister of war. "The Paraguayans will break themselves against us now. We are impregnable."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say: "What then?" But I said: "Yes, it seems likely."

"We cannot be beaten," he accentuated. "We have immense reserves."

I looked across at young Tejada, saying nothing. It was

such a different story. A story of a nation with its back against the wall; the wall of the Andes.

"Bloody awful mess——" I said, as we walked out of the building.

Tejada shrugged. "Yes—worse than that."

Young secretaries, fiercely patriotic, almost wild eyed, buttonholed me. They would not let me escape them. They held to my arm tight, talking with tremendous urgency. They would make me know the right.

"Paraguay has played her last card. She is done for. Beaten! Beaten! Our strategy has beaten her!"

It made me morose and angry by turns. They overwhelmed me with propaganda, and I read it carefully.

"La Justicia contra el machete" was the title of one thick book. "Civilizacion contra Barbarie" was another. That was the line of propaganda, almost exactly similar to that of the Italians against Abyssinia.

"They are a race of savages under the heel of Argentine," said another book. "We must civilize them; lift them out of their ignorance and educate them. Always Paraguay has been tyrannized. There are practically no schools."

Poor Paraguay! lacking culture; lacking all the refinements of civilization; fighting with barbarian machetes against flame throwers, machine-guns, tanks, fighting planes, and modern weapons!

I said: "You know I have just come from Paraguay? From Asuncion, seat of South American culture?"

They almost wrung their hands, and I sat as calmly as I could under their burning eyes. It was clear to me from the propaganda that complete conquest of Paraguay had been the original plan.

"Ah, but you do not know. You do not see. They are poor savages."

I saw that Bolivia consisted of 86 per cent. Indians practically uneducated and uneducable, and 14 per cent. white men. Paraguay, on the other hand, was 90 per cent. a very high

grade native race mixed with Spanish blood, and 10 per cent. pure Spanish.*

Each day the newspapers printed fearful stories of Paraguayan atrocities and terrible deeds perpetrated on prisoners. Clearly the Bolivian authorities were doing all in their power to keep up the morale and war spirit at home.

"We treat prisoners just as well as our own people," they told me.

"I should like to see," I replied. And assured them that their fears for their own men were unfounded. I had talked with dozens, and inspected thousands.

It was rather a touchy point with Bolivia to mention numbers of prisoners. There were only about 2,500 in the whole country against 30,000 in Paraguay.

They changed the subject and became tragically sorry for Paraguay. "There are only children fighting for them now," they told me. "We have prisoners fifteen years old and less. They say there are no men left in Paraguay."

With difficulty I refrained from disabusing them.

I was provided with a great deal of literature on the subject of Paraguayan aggression, explaining how Paraguay had planned the war.

"You must realize that they began it," said the young ministers, "and had planned this war for years."

They did not say why Paraguay had waited until she had no army or money herself, and until Bolivia's large army was fully armed, trained, and ready.

Propaganda became pathetic, useless, and vile for anyone who had seen both sides. Only their accusations against Argentine had any foundation in fact. One of the many anti-Argentine books was called: "Los Negreros del Chaco y los Maquiavelismos de la Diplomacia" and bore a sub-title: "Crucifixion del pueblo Paraguayo."

This book was extraordinarily simple, and explained how

* This does not, of course, include the German element; now considerable. They are exempt from war service.

Bolivia fought Paraguay to release her from "Argentine bondage." The first page of the book said that the war was arranged by Argentine capitalists in the Chaco (that meant my friend with his 40,000 head of cattle). The book goes on to show how Argentine had always had Paraguay under her thumb, and refers to Paraguay as an Argentine protectorate.

Without doubt Argentine would like this to be true, but it isn't.

The text continues regretting that there is no one in Paraguay with the courage to denounce the "Argentine criminals in a voice of thunder!" It refers frequently to "La Satanica diplomacia Argentine" and states—"Bolivia is fighting virtually with the Argentine," and continues in that strain.

Among many pathetic passages is the following: "Bolivia ha triunfado ya; su causa es el triunfo de la verdad juridica."

The importance of this booklet and propaganda of the same strain is that Argentine was always in the forefront of the peace movements, combining with Brazil, Chile, Peru and the League of Nations, and it will be realized more clearly in view of this anti-Argentine propaganda how difficult was the task.

Argentine was unquestionably helping Paraguay, and I am not sure whether this fits her for peace negotiations or not. I rather think it does—for no peace could be lasting without Argentine approval.

Bolivia certainly had some sort of complaint against Argentine, and I felt some sympathy, but most of her propaganda was fantastic. One booklet entitled "Violations of the Practices of International Law" was as nauseating as our own Great War propaganda. The book accused Paraguay of the most vile atrocities, and almost every accusation was signed by a general. The booklet refers to the Hague Convention, whose "evident intention is to humanize war" (as if war could ever be humanized!), and ends its preface:

"The Government of Bolivia believes that in denouncing officially

these acts, done in the past and the present by the armies of Paraguay in their conquest of the territories which by the traditional American rights are and should be under the sovereignty of Bolivia, it renders a high homage to civilization."

The Americans have a word for it.

Here are a few extracts from the book.

"Among the Paraguayan dead we found Bolivian prisoners with their hands tied, *proof* (italics mine) that they were used as protection to Paraguayan first lines."

"In the first armed clashes of this conflict which took place in Laguna Chuquisaca* the Paraguayans killed Bolivian wounded and mutilated the dead in a horrible way, boasting a nameless ferocity. While we wait for palpable proofs of these attempts we are publishing them so that the world will know of these monstrosities."

These paragraphs do not represent the hysterical outpourings of a nation in face of defeat. The book was first issued in 1932 when Bolivia fancied herself invincible.

It seemed to me that the one really useful task I could do in Bolivia was to examine the Standard Oil question as thoroughly as possible, and together with Tejada Flores I had the records of the various departments made available to me. Confidentially I had learned that there was litigation pending between Bolivia and S.O.C.O.B. The company was accused of corking oil wells and holding up on production. Certainly relations between the country and the company were not those of hand in glove workers.

I went through the ledgers noting monthly payments of roughly \$400,000 Bolivianos† each month from Bolivia to S.O.C.O.B. for goods supplied: gasoline, lubricating and crude oils. That didn't prove anything. I searched through correspondence and found receipts. The government appeared to be hiding nothing from me.

I am convinced that the government of Bolivia purchased oils from S.O.C.O.B. and paid for them during the whole

* Paraguayans call this "Pitiantuta."

† 100,000 U.S. Dollars at Par.



MAP SHOWING BOLIVIA'S OUTLETS TO THE SEA, RAILWAYS AND RIVERS

Facing p. 384.

See p. 385, and war section.

progress of the war, and that there was no direct loan of any kind to the country. Whether S.O.C.O.B. by means of the parent company S.O.C.O.N.Y., and its banking ramifications, helped Bolivia, I have no means of finding out. I do know—and this may be some guide—that United States companies supplied a very small proportion of armaments. Most of the business went to Europe and Messrs. Vickers Armstrong's.

I cannot attempt to convey the amount of talk that went to the finding out of these few facts, and still I was no nearer finding out what the war was about from the Bolivian angle. It was utterly useless for them to suggest that Paraguay began it and that they were defending themselves. I went back to the railway chief in desperation.

"Tell me what this war is about," I said.

He sat back in his chair and swathed himself in blue smoke from his cigar.

"Well, really, Bolivia thinks she wants a port."

"What good would be a port on the Paraguay river south of Bahia Negra?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Not much. She wants a west coast port. Chile and Peru treat her very well, but she's dead set on a port of her own. Personally I think it's foolishness, and I've said so. I've told them that a port of their own would mean building a harbour, wharves, customs houses, maintaining a small force of soldiers and police, and all kinds of expense they now avoid. They won't listen——"

I had at least a talking point with the President and his son, and the ministers. I had them admitting that what they really wanted was a west coast port, and having the admission I said bluntly—"Then why do you fight in the Chaco?"

I really think they had begun to wonder why. They knew their propaganda hadn't done any good with me. I had said frankly time and again: "I'm going to know what this war is about. Stop telling me about first shots, historical rights, and what not. Let's get down to it."

They had told me of the millions of good fertile acres they

had undeveloped in the Yungas valleys and Beni country. They had told me enough to show me clearly that they couldn't need the Chaco as territory.

"We fight in the Chaco," they said, "because we feel we must have an outlet of our own. A port on the Paraguay would be immensely valuable."

It was an immense relief to have a clear statement out of all the maze and muddle, and I clung to it.

"How would it be valuable?" I asked.

They looked at me queerly: "To ship our goods."

"How?" I asked again, and softened it down a bit. "You must know all about the Chaco," I pleaded. "Tell me how you propose to convey your goods across the Chaco. There isn't any stone for roadmaking, and you could only get across in the dry seasons. A railway would cost millions. The Argentine own all the wharves from Asuncion to Buenos Aires."

"We think it would be valuable," they said.

But I knew that in the minds of the President and his Ministers the war had been a ghastly mistake, a mistake costing more than a hundred thousand lives, and the delayed development of two fertile countries both needing population and money.

Salamanca, a broken old man, writing his memoirs in Cochabamba, was the scapegoat.*

*Ex-President Salamanca died in July 1935.

CHAPTER XIX

TOWARDS THE AMAZON

I. THE JOURNEY

THERE had been a good deal of strain and anxiety in these days, and I was drawn as fine as a wire. I was keyed up perpetually, listening to arguments, often impassioned, examining facts and figures, preserving always (or nearly always) a quiet reserve, not natural to me. I had to watch my words and gestures, and in this, I think, the foreign language helped me: I was less likely to spill words without thought, and if at times I said the wrong thing I might be excused.

Most of all I found the nights long empty hours that I dreaded. At night the thinness of the air seemed to be accentuated, and I staved off the coming of night at the Strangers' Club, drinking a little, dicing a little, talking freely—and that was the greatest rest of all—until Eddie tired of his poker game, and our shoes rang loud on the cobbles as we made our way home.

The Alti-Plano grew in my mind to grotesque proportions, seeming inescapable, imprisoning. This world on top of the world lost its relationship with the world below, and I wanted to run, and go on running until I dropped, having the same emotions as a man tearing at prison walls with his finger nails.

But I could not go. I was often amazed at the calmness of my voice and the normalty of my behaviour. They seemed to have no relation to myself or my thoughts. Yet if a chance had occurred for me to leave the Alti-Plano in the "twunklynge of an e'e" I doubt whether I should have taken it.

"Go down the Yungas," said the President. "My son

will go with you. Go to-morrow; in a day or two you will be amongst oranges, mandarins, and tropical forests."

I couldn't believe it. I felt that if I could see this miracle it would soften Bolivia for me.

Early next morning Tejada Flores came for me in his car. He had a young friend with him, just out of the Chaco, and an Indian chauffeur skilled on the mountain passes. I said good-bye to Eddie.

"I've got plenty to do yet," Eddie said. "I'll be ready to go when you come back. We'll travel together to Buenos Aires."

I climbed into the car. Eddie waved his cigar and grinned. We climbed steeply out of La Paz, and looked down at the city through the great jagged spines of rock, and seeing it like that the stress and strain began to ease out of me, and I sat back, relaxed.

"You'll feel better to-night," said Tejada. "We'll sleep at eight thousand feet, and won't you sleep!"

I cherish the feeling of that journey down towards the Amazon among the memories I would least part with. It is all rather blurred, a green convalescent memory of rest and peace. I know that if this journey had occurred at the beginning of my venture instead of at the end I might easily have filled pages with fact and description. Beneath us, as we topped the peaks above La Paz, the road wound a narrow white trail around vast black walls of rock, and right ahead of us was a huge mountain, black and sinister, holding a deep swathe of snow in the curve of its breast.

We stopped and looked on this huge picture, satisfying in its barrenness, the great sweep of its curves. Far beneath us on the road we could distinguish mules toiling upwards, small black shapes bustling like ants around them. There were no signs of vegetation.

It was not a journey for a nervous man, but fortunately my exhaustion was not of that nervous order. The road was comparatively good, but narrow, with many hairpin bends,

and lacking any sort of parapet. Down we went at forty miles an hour, hugging the mountain walls, rattling over wooden plank bridges beneath which there was simply emptiness, and always a drop of three thousand feet or more waited for a slip of our offside wheels.

I was too tired to be frightened. I remember thinking that the life of the President's son was undoubtedly precious, and that the Bolivian Indian knew his business. Many times we came upon processions of mules and asses, the beasts sprawling over the road, trudging patiently with their heavy bundles of *coca* leaves bulging from their sides, their fat-faced Indian escorts herding the beasts frantically in single file against our approach. We seldom lessened speed to any extent. It seemed the province of other traffic to evade us as best it could. Often I looked back to see the Indians picking themselves up from the dusty road, chasing their frightened mules and asses, and laughing happily at us, when I had expected boulders to shatter our windows. A more good-natured, long-suffering race I have never known.

Perhaps they knew the car's identity—and cars are not as thick as fleas on this trail down to the Amazon. At any rate they smiled or laughed aloud at their misfortunes, men and women alike. Sometimes their frightened beasts would attempt to climb up or down the mountain slopes in places where there might be some sort of foothold. Even then the Indians would chase them laughing while, it seemed to me, risking their lives.

It was natural that many Indians preferred to use the old mountain trails, dangerous as they were, and we saw them and their beasts like moving friezes high upon the bare mountains.

A few miles down we crossed a railway line which Tejada explained to me had been constructed by an uncle of his. The job, however, had proved in vain since the gradient was too severe for a steam engine. It seemed strange that this calculation had been overlooked, but I understood that such

events are quite normal in South America, and excite little comment. Perhaps an Indian laughs.

The line pleased Tejada Flores a good deal. It was one of the first jobs waiting for him when (and if)* his electrical studies were completed. The line would work well electrified.

The drive downwards refreshed me miraculously. After an hour I had not only accustomed myself to ignoring the sheer drop a foot or two from my side of the car, but also had begun to feel an ease in mere existence. The bare walls of the mountains gave way to a softer look, and soon to grey-green, as first the cactus, then a few shrubs, and finally great trees sprung from their sides. Two or three times during the day we sped through small villages, six or a dozen mud or plaster hovels planted amongst the thick undergrowth of the mountains, or resting on the very lips of the precipices. And now there were bursts of brilliant blossoms, the velvet warmth of oranges dappling the trees, the rare bloom of orchids. Trees clustered thickly over the walls of the mountains, seeming no thicker than match sticks on the distant sides of the valleys. New valleys, golden in the dying sun, opened ahead of us at almost every turn of the road, valley opened into valley, each more vivid, warm and beautiful than the last. Skeins of water poured downwards in solid shafts of silver-blue brilliance from the heights, sometimes dashing themselves to fragments on protruding ledges and boulders, and appearing lost, or else joining the now small torrent that gathered force with every mile in the hollow crease of the valley floor, the very beginning of the Amazon.

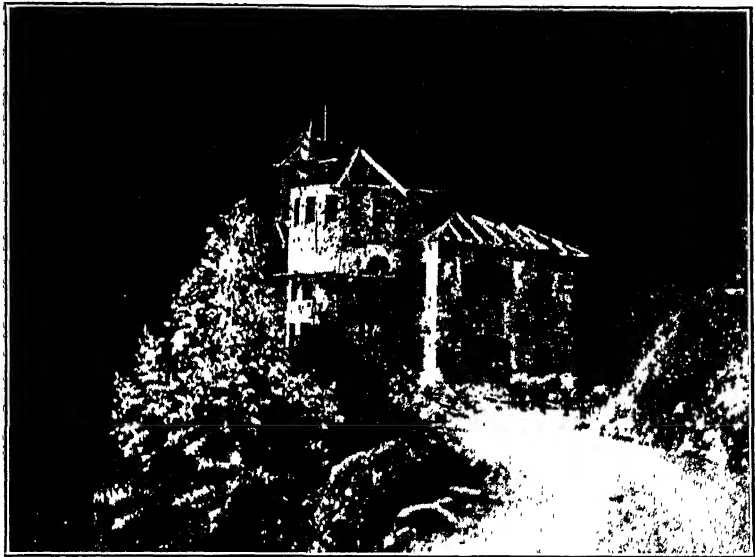
At first I had the relief of seeing the vast maw of emptiness lessen until just as we reached the very floor of the valley, and the torrent rushed within fifty feet of us, a hairpin bend revealed a new valley, deep as the last. And down we went again, only to find ourselves up again as soon as we reached the bottom.

* I had a Christmas card from him postmarked for Los Angeles, Cal., so all is well.



THE ROAD WOUND A NARROW WHITE TRAIL

See p. 388



"TO BUILD A CASTLE HERE." MULES WITH COCA AT CHACO PACIFICO

Facing p. 390

So it would go on until the broad stream of the Amazon itself was reached, for this small torrent, growing with every slender waterfall, was the Unduavi, which would at length become the Beni, become the Mamore, the Madre de Dios, the Amazon. I watched the growth of the stream with excitement and wonder. To me it was the birth of the greatest river that seams the earth. I had seen the first discernible trickle, forming, gathering, moulding its course amongst the great boulders, absorbing hungrily, growing.

"Aren't you glad to be alive now!" said young Tejada, seeming happy as I had become.

"I wouldn't have missed this for anything."

And I thought again of how I might bring Pat to me so that we might continue right on to where the Amazon meets the sea. It is a simple trip, and it seemed a shame to have come so far only to turn back. I had no money. And in the end one must have money. So much may be wangled, and God knows it seemed to me that I had wangled a goodish bit, but there comes an end. I thought this was it. I was too tired. I had lost more than a stone on this Bolivian trip, nearly two stone below my health weight. It beat me.

"There's a surprise for you in a minute," said Tejada. The sun had disappeared and taken the colour with it, leaving only a sudden coldness and feeling of immensity in its place. Yet there was the remains of light, a dull green over the mountains losing itself in blackness downwards. Suddenly around a bend, far away, I saw the outline of a castle, and behind the castle a scarf of water fell from the mountain-top sheer to the Unduavi.

"This is my father's estate," said young Tejada somewhat bashfully. "We call it Chaco Pacifico. It's peaceful right enough."

"What a grand idea!" I said. "To build a castle down here—miles from anywhere—a real castle. . . ." I felt I was in fairyland.

II. WHERE THE WORLD MAY BE FORGOTTEN

Within ten minutes we had reached the castle, and a curve of the road revealed a small village of mud huts strewn over the bank of the gorge. A tall thick-set Bolivian with a blue chin like a hatchet welcomed us joyously, and clearly had a great affection for his young master. This evil-looking individual—his face was exactly of the type Spaniards and South Americans use to illustrate thugs in magazines—was really the kindest and gentlest of mortals. He had the eyes of a spaniel hidden under the curve of his black slouch hat and his heavy brows, and whereas in an Englishman such a manner would indicate a cringing abomination, in this simple Bolivian it was entirely genuine, and unservile.

A table had been set for us with salads, goats'-milk cheese and black bread, and we sat down to eat with enjoyment. The castle was not yet habitable, but the President had rigged good temporary quarters in a bungalow with a wide verandah about a hundred feet above the racing stream.

So the three of us sat and talked and smoked peacefully, watching the moon as it came over the mountains and wrapped us together with all this strange world in soft white radiance.

"You like the Chaco Pacifico better than the other Chaco?" said Tejada.

"I wonder you don't too," I said. "I can't think what you want with that bit of country with all this down here."

Beneath us as the ground levelled out was the fertile Beni province in which one man, Saavedra Suarez, owned eight million acres of rubber. Everything grew in abundance.

The Yungas valleys and the Beni was a subject they loved to talk about. The mountain slopes were rich in an almost everlasting supply of good timber, scarcely touched. Oranges, mandarins, and all kinds of citrus fruits flourished in the warm valleys. Coca grew abundantly stepped in trenches over the mountain slopes. Rubber was yet to be developed.



A SMALL VILLAGE OF MUD HUTS

Saavedra Suarez ran a regular service of cargo launches up the Beni to join the Amazon. It was as simple as a trip from London to Reading up the Thames to journey from Bolivia or Peru to Para, or the other way about, but for all its simplicity, a journey well worth taking for the amazing variety of its wild life and vegetation.

I was angry that I had come to the very threshold of the journey, only to return. But the whole trouble with travelling is that you must stop somewhere, and wherever that may be there is always somewhere else a little farther on that you just cannot miss. Travelling really goes on for ever.

Inevitably our conversation came round to war. Tejada told me that one of their greatest difficulties had been to keep up supplies of coca to the troops. Without coca they would not—or could not—fight. A man is able to keep going for a week with only this drug to help him. To a smaller extent Paraguay had a similar problem with supplies of yerba maté.

We argued the question of a port. I persisted that a port on the west coast was their real need and desire. The United States Vice-Consul had given me a booklet issued by the consulate in 1930, and I quoted this passage:

“La Paz, the most important city of Bolivia, would undoubtedly benefit by an outlet to the Pacific Ocean, as would the rest of the Republic. This is the hope now held by most of the Bolivian people.”

All our arguments boiled down to this fact in the end: given a port on the west coast there would be no more trouble. Knowing the Paraguay river over most of its length I think I convinced these two young Bolivians of the difficulties an eastern outlet would bring.

We kept up these arguments for an hour or so without too much heat, though at times I was tactless. These young men were so English-seeming in their appearance and manners, that I was constantly forgetting the nearness of the war to

them. We went to bed early, the three of us sleeping on three narrow camp beds side by side. The next thing I knew was Tejada rubbing himself strenuously with a strip of towelling at the foot of my bed.

"We've rigged up a shower—it'll awaken you——"

"You bet it will."

Half an hour later with two eggs and a cup of coffee inside me I was feeling more like a human being than I had done since leaving Buenos Aires. There was a crisp bite in the early morning air. The valley was in shade, and we watched the sun's light creeping down the high green walls of the mountains, until all at once it flooded us with its warmth.

Beneath us the torrent leapt and roared, and Tejada explained that his father intended to dam it up, and stock it with trout from England.

It would be a magnificent place for a holiday and I should have been content to go no farther for a day or two. But there were many things Tejada had to show me, and we continued our journey. Hourly the country grew richer in vegetation. Small coca trenches terraced the more gentle slopes of the mountains, villages became more frequent, and occasionally we met parties of Paraguayan prisoners working on the roads. The lean aquiline faces of these Paraguayans cannot wear the peaceful submissive look of the fat Bolivian Indios, but the prisoners seemed in good physical condition and well treated. Their guards were armed with rifles, though the problem of escape was insuperable.

"Do you keep all your prisoners down here?" I asked.

"We have a lot at Sucre," they told me. "We used to keep them at Uyuni."

"Uyuni! Isn't that the high point just this side of Atocha on the Alti-Plano? The place where I nearly froze?"

"Yes, that's it," they agreed. "We found all the prisoners died of cold—pneumonia—so we decided to have them down here."

They went on to explain that they had not done that since

the early days of the war, and now removed all prisoners to the joys of the glorious valleys.

Several times we stopped to look around us. In one place prisoners were felling trees high up on the mountain slopes, and we watched the trees tumbling to the river beneath, seeming no larger than tufted cabbage stalks until they shattered the water.

Presently we came to a prison camp, and plucked warm oranges from the trees around us while a sturdy white-haired Bolivian told us of his charges, their contentment, their peculiarities. One young Paraguayan refused to wear Bolivian shoes since his own had worn out, and wandered about barefoot and disconsolate. He appeared to be in the best of health, and suffered nothing more than laughter from his captors.

But the Paraguayans were inconsolable in captivity, longing for *maté*, for home, for the grace and warmth of their women, and the fertility of their hectares.

We were now in a glorious climate at a height of about five thousand feet. I have read somewhere in an old book—"In the Yunga a perpetual spring seems to reign." The world was full of rich vivid colour unclouded by a particle of dust, and the air seemed to sparkle.

"Tejada," I said; "you must develop this country; build that railway and electrify it; take the produce of this region out through the west. It beats me that you worry about the Chaco when you've got all this down here." I think it beat him too.

For nearly a hundred years Bolivia has been struggling with the problem of the Beni regions, and if she had given a tenth of the effort to the job that she gave to the Chaco war (and a tenth of the money) this land would now be a great source of wealth. The effort has never been sustained. With the steam navigation of the Amazon and some of its tributaries an outlet has been established to the Atlantic, but the rapids of the Madera river have so far, I believe, proved insurmount-

able. This river has eighteen rapids over a distance of two hundred and thirty miles, and in the 'eighties an attempt was made to span this distance with a railroad. The attempt proved terribly costly in human lives.

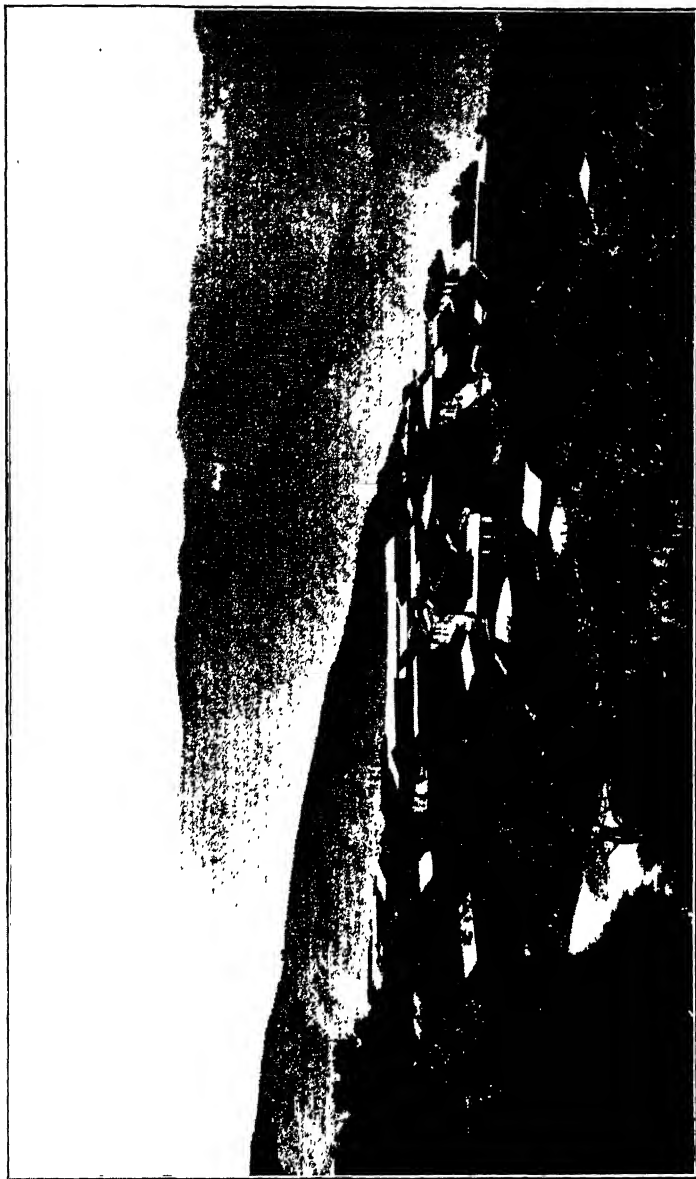
I formed the impression that with her government high up in the mountains, and her mineral wealth spread before her eyes, Bolivia gives too little attention to this region.

But in spite of our frequent arguments we achieved a holiday spirit on our journey. High in a cleft of the mountains they had me gaping at the figure of the "Mad Miner," asking all sorts of questions about him; his nationality; how he got his food; if anyone ever spoke to him. To all of these questions Tejada had satisfactory answers, and it was the Indian chauffeur who gave the game away and burst out laughing. The "Mad Miner" is simply a rock formation, amazingly lifelike.

An hour or two later we saw the red roofs of Chulumani spread over the green slopes, and dived down through narrow streets into a plaza that seemed to sleep until our arrival awakened a mob of Indians to greet us. A grand old man with long grey moustaches embraced Tejada Flores loyally and with great affection, and welcomed us to his home. His son had just escaped from the Chaco where he had been a prisoner, and was all smiles at young Tejada's praise. It was a happy family gathering, and for an hour we sat around sipping potent concoctions and laughing at each other.

The mountains had grown more gracious, and could well hold small towns on their broad curving bosoms. We strolled idly through the town to the hospital the Americans have established in this fairyland. Few men would have much chance of coming through an operation alive at the high levels, while here in Chulumani there is as good a chance of life as anywhere.

Time and the cares of the world had no meaning in Chulumani. It is at the ends of the earth. It knows nothing of poison gas, dictators, and other delights of civilization.



THE RED ROOFS OF CHULUMANI

It goes simply about its business, packing off its mule trains to climb to distant La Paz with oranges and coca, and hearing vague rumours of South American affairs. It has no problems. It is an enviable little town showing its red roofs to the everlasting sun.

Time was short for me. Far away in Buenos Aires or Azul Pat was waiting practically without money. We went on down until we stood at the junction of the Unduavi with the La Paz river, and watched the now broad stream career on its course to the Amazon.

"Not many white men have stood here," said Tejada, "if that pleases you——"

It did please me mightily. And then regretfully we turned back and raced up the mountains. I had so far recovered as to do my share of driving, finding it less nerve wracking going up, but I held my eyes glued to the mountain wall, and never once looked down. I was angry at myself because of my fear of heights, and dared not show it with these people. To them, born on the mountains it would, I thought, be incomprehensible, and I did not wish to appear a worse coward than I am.

At one of our stops to change drivers a tree spanned a cleft in the mountains. "I'll take a snap of you sitting on that tree," said Tejada.

From where we stood it seemed a fairly broad tree, but when I reached it I found two slender trees with a gap of a foot between them, and through this gap I looked down, shuddering, to the bottom of the world. I died a hundred times on my short journey to the centre of the cleft, feeling myself a whirling starfish of arms and legs, bouncing from ledges, careering on—down down—wondering how soon I should die. Tejada took my snap. I'm still not cured of heights.

We hung around the castle for the best part of a day inspecting the work, and trying to get some sort of estimate from the Indians as to when it would be habitable. That

being impossible we had some rifle practice with Paraguayan rifles at a target the Indians placed for us high on the mountain side. We didn't hit the target in a score of shots apiece, but this, said Tejada, showed how bad were the Paraguayan rifles.

"You must bring your wife to stay with us here next year. The war'll be over then, won't it? We'll fish, shoot and explore around. You can write. It'll be grand," urged Tejada.

And sometimes when I read of Hitler, Mussolini, France, Russia and the hellish mess and menace of Europe I think of this castle in the peaceful valley of the Yungas down towards the Amazon.



TEJADA FLORES WHERE THE UNDUAVI MEETS THE LA PAZ

CHAPTER XX

THE END OF IT ALL

I. LEAVING

It was good to see Eddie again. He had done his shopping, and was all set to go. "Gosh, Tom, old-timer! The sooner I'm in Arizona the better I'll like it!"

Poker had treated Eddie reasonably well, and he had changed blocks of Bolivianos into real dollars, and was itching to find someone or something to spend it on. "I'm getting rid of this lot in six months, Tom—I'd best get going."

He wanted to buy motor cars, and was exactly like a small boy. "Say, Tom, why not let's fly back from here?" But I wouldn't do that. I had seen enough; too much. "They'll give you a swell reception in Chile," Eddie assured. But I didn't want a swell reception anywhere, except back in B.A. with my wife. Another country would have given me the "willies." All I wanted was home.

A mining friend of Eddie's had arrived from Chocaya, and was to travel with us. He was the quiet type of American, and gave the impression of being a bit of a dark horse about everything. His enthusiasms were very silent. But we liked him. For these two the holiday had already begun, and they had an idea my advice on how to spend money would be invaluable. They should have asked my advice on how not to spend it. I was an expert in that line, and could hold a thousand dollar bill in my hand without an itch.

"Say, Tom," said Eddie, "do you reckon we could have any sort of a time on five hundred real dollars for a week in B.A.?"

"My God!" I said. "I've had some good times on a fiver."

But Eddie and his quiet friend wanted to set the town alight. They were starved right down to the bone.

I wandered around La Paz for a day or two, but it was unwise to loiter in the native quarters. Typhus was as thick as in Asuncion, and I didn't see what I might gain anyway. I thought I knew as much as might be known.

Meanwhile Pickwood, the U.S. Vice-Consul, and Tejada Flores leavened all my passport difficulties, and squeezed the work of days into a few hours. On the night before I was to leave La Paz the President gave a small informal dinner party for me. A dozen young men from the ministries were there, and one young man with the burning black eyes of a fanatic clung to me like a leach. Was I sure I had all necessary information? Was I sure that Bolivia was right? They fired the first shot!

I behaved to this young man as I might have done to a sick friend. He was dangerous. His ardour burning him up.

Señora Tejada Sorzino was a charming hostess, saving me from the fire of the young ministers during dinner. We talked together of London and Buenos Aires while the young men discoursed loudly, and for my benefit, of how Paraguay was beaten; how her last card had been played. And the President sat like a bland Buddha, saying little.

Young Tejada Flores, I regretted, was not present, and without Señora Tejada, his mother, I might have been in deep water.

As soon as dinner was over the President invited me to his study for coffee and a cigar. He sat down on a settee while I walked slowly around the room. On the President's desk was a copy of *Merchants of Death* and I flicked the pages carelessly. A group photograph hung on a wall.

"That's in Washington," said the President. "Ayala is there."

"Yes—I see," I said, and I went and sat down beside him. We were silent for a full minute. I said: "Sir, only a few weeks ago I was sitting talking to President Ayala as I am to

you now. I found him a quiet reasonable man." I was suddenly wild.

"Why can't you talk together? Why couldn't you have settled all this? Even now. You ought to meet."*

The President's face was very grave. "Ayala and I were good friends," he said slowly. "In Washington . . . I wanted to go and talk things over with him before war broke out. . . . Salamanca didn't like the idea."

"Salamanca wanted war," I said.

"Oh no. It was peaceful penetration. Our men had instructions not to start anything."

But there was no doubt that Tejada Sorzino saw the ghastly waste of it all, and suddenly he said: "What do you think—will there be peace?"

And I said: "Yes, I think peace will come at any moment. It's all over now."

He agreed. He told me how he had always worked for peace, consistent with honour, but peace, consistent with honour, had become almost an impossibility in face of Paraguayan victories. The longing for peace was very real in Bolivia, much more so than in Paraguay where they had resigned themselves to fight to the death.

We talked of the immense field for development in Bolivia. There was such a tremendous amount to be done in Bolivia and Paraguay that it was an utter, vacant, stupid madness that these countries should waste their energies and life's blood in fighting.

"It'll take seven years to catch up," said the President gravely; "when there is peace."

I thought that was an optimistic estimate, but I didn't say so. Even seven years is too much to lose in these days of rapid progress. Time and again Bolivia has resorted to war, and now lags far behind Chile and Peru in development, losing almost everything and gaining nothing.

* Don Federico wrote to say "Your suggestion about the President's meeting has come about."

I came back to the war in one last attempt to find some hidden meaning in it all. "You really need a west coast port, sir, more than anything; far more than a port on the Paraguay river?"

"Yes," he agreed.

"Chile is friendly. She could well afford to give you a few miles of coastline," I remarked.

Tejada Sorzino shrugged his heavy shoulders. "You know as much about it as anyone," he said. "I've enjoyed having you here. You've been a good lad to come."

I thanked him. I felt again the burden of the job I had undertaken.

"It's a rotten job—commenting on this war," I said. "Both here and in Paraguay I have been treated with the utmost courtesy, and I'm afraid I'm going to make an enemy of you."

"I hope not," said Tejada Sorzino. "I don't think you'll do that."

And we said good-bye.

Before Eddie and I went to bed that night we checked up on our passports to make sure there wouldn't be a hitch. There was a small notice printed on each passport:

Senor Extranjero:

Sea Vd. leal al pais que le da hospitalidad. No haga comentarios sobre asuntos que no conoce.

II. OUT OF BOLIVIA

At the moment of leaving Bolivia my patience nearly left me. I had to appear regretful. I was wild with nervous anxiety to see the Argentine and Pat. The railway station was thick with humanity, rushing, tumbling, squabbling, shouting. Here and there military officials or ministers stood in oases of gush outside their compartments. Tejada Flores, and several young ministers had come to wish me God-speed,

and assure themselves that I really did hear Bolivia's last word. A further bulky parcel of literature arrived.

I was grateful for the sight of Pickwood's burly figure cleaving a wide track towards me. "Hello, young feller—fixed up all right?"

"Thanks to you, sir."

He grabbed my arm. "I want you to meet the United States Minister. He's transferring to Santiago, travelling with you as far as Uyuni. As a matter of fact he's done you out of a special coach—we've only one available."

"I'd hate a special coach," I said, and followed in his wake.

At last the train started. The urgent young man of the dinner party found me and ran along beside the train, gripping my hand—"Write to me! Write to me!"

Tejada Flores and Pickwood were standing together waving. The train crawled upwards, two engines forward, and a third aft. Eddie came along, and stood on the Pullman steps beside me.

"Thank God we're off, Eddie——"

"Take it easy," said Eddie.

For an hour we shunted up that one thousand foot climb to the Alti-Plano, and only when we topped the lip of the desert, and La Paz was gone, did I feel that I was on my way.

All through the day the three of us, Eddie, his pal Charles and I, played capitan, watched the desert, almost with joy, and talked of our homes. My whole mind was singing: "I'm on my way—three more days—three more days—three more days——" It beat to the slow rhythm of the wheels.

The black-haired, pale-faced female "spy" greeted us happily.—"I must examine your baggage, señores——"

"You can have a grand time with mine," I promised. "Open all the parcels of books and have a good read."

She settled down in our sleeper, and went to it. Soon after dinner a message came from the United States minister

asking me to join him in his special coach. I left Eddie and Charles unwillingly, and made my way to the end of the train. There was a stove burning brightly in the minister's coach. "Glad you've come," he greeted. "We wanted you for dinner—couldn't find you."

He introduced his wife, two or three men and the wife of one of them. They were a cheery party and I was glad I had come.

"What about some bridge?"

I said I wasn't keen. The wife of the minister rescued me from the possibility. "Oh, but we'd like to know about the war. What you think. We only know our side."

I wanted to talk about the war even less than I wanted to play bridge. I said more or less bluntly: "Oh, Paraguay is right of course. I've been trying to find something to say in Bolivia's favour, and all I can do is to straighten out the S.O.C.O.B. story."

I said something about Bolivia having such fine armaments in the beginning, and Paraguay having had nothing. A small man with a few wisps of hair over a round head took that up.

"Arms were nothing to do with the war," he said forcefully.

"Can't fight without them," I observed. "Men with knuckle-dusters are always keener on a fight than a man with bare fists."

The small man had a very alive face. He was angry. It amused me slightly. I was so very tired that I don't think I was capable of excitement, or intense interest in anything.

"Nonsense!" barked the small man. "Blaming it all on to arms. Men will fight with bows and arrows. Can't stop them fighting."

The ministerial department remained more or less neutral. They seemed to want an argument to develop between the small man and me. I roused myself to have the last word.

"I believe that without arms there wouldn't be wars," I said carefully. "I believe that armament manufacturers

by touting for orders, selling a submarine, aeroplane, tank to one country, and then rushing across to a neighbouring land to tell them all about it—I believe these people, as much as any one thing, make wars.”

Of course I was mad to think that I should get away with a statement like that. The little man was almost dancing with rage. I wished I had kept my mouth shut.

“Do you know who I am?” asked the small man furiously.

“No,” I said. (And he saw that I didn’t know him from a bar of soap.)

“I’m the South American representative of Vickers-Armstrong.” He handed me his card.

“Should I congratulate you on your territory?” I said. And I laughed. I couldn’t help it. The little man had thought I was getting at him personally. The U.S. minister said: “Thompson’s an English newspaper man, George—you two are in luck.”

We had no more arguments that night. Next day, when the minister’s private car had branched off on the Antofagasta line I introduced the armament man to the boys, and we all dined together.

I learned a good deal about armaments and the methods of selling them in the next few days; I liked George. I think he made wars as surely as I’m writing these words, but he didn’t look at it that way. He said they’d buy the goods from someone else, and it was his living. George didn’t see how he could do anything about it personally. None of us ever can, so it just goes on being bad, and getting worse.

He told me that he had visited Asuncion, but that they hadn’t had any money. The finance minister was always his first call, he said. “If the money’s right I start in to do business. In Asuncion I raised my hat and wished them good day.” George had then made a bee-line for Bolivia. Peru and Ecuador had looked like having trouble, but had patched it up without resorting to war. George would have had the order, but he was philosophical—sometimes customers

do that kind of thing. He felt it was rare, and not worth worrying about. War, he thought, was as sure to break out as measles.

At any rate Bolivia had run true. Vickers had supplied a £1,750,000 contract, and "Believe me," said George, "they had the finest light artillery in the world. Heavy stuff's no good in the Chaco."

The army, he confirmed, had been well trained, and was eighty thousand strong, and as well equipped as any in the world. Brunos, Skodas, Bosfors (backed by Krupps) of Sweden, and a few other continental companies had most of the business, and also a company in Mexico. This last company called itself The United American Arms Company, but wasn't anything to do with the United States, said George. They jobbed off a lot of second-hand stuff. He confirmed the explanation of the U.S. army uniforms, and dismissed the suggestion of United States backing as "piffle"—this was a word George liked. It suited him.

Bolivia had had plenty of trouble with her armaments through buying cheap stuff. George had some good stories to tell, and we all three of us enjoyed having him in the party. "Any fool," said George, "can make a hand grenade, but only the best firms can time them right down to four or five seconds." Bolivia had been served with a quantity of grenades timed as high as ten seconds, thus (said George) giving the Paraguayans ample time to pick them up, and throw them back.

We didn't quite agree about the word "ample"—imagining George's rotund little body scuttling around after grenades with about two seconds to go, picking them up and hurling them back, joyful as a flea. But undoubtedly many of these cheap bombs had proved boomerangs.

The worst scandal of all had been a delivery of 36,000 rifles from Czechoslovakia all of them one millimetre too small in the breach to take a clip of cartridges.

"I warned 'em," said George, puffing up like an angry hen. "But they would buy cheap."

The rifles had come under the Vickers contract, but had been released by them. The rifles had been tested with single cartridges, and were serviceable only as single shot weapons. Bolivia had tried to fix the blame onto the indignant George. In the end an expert had arrived from Czechoslovakia and the whole consignment had been rebored.

There had been also considerable trouble with the gun barrels of the field pieces, but it was a little too technical for me. "Well," I said, "if ever I start a war you'll have the order (if the money's right). I didn't think I'd ever write a testimonial for an armament firm, but you've sold me Vickers."

George was a cheerful companion, and played capitan more abominably than I did. That turned out well, for Eddie and Charles were probably born shaking dice boxes, and smoking cigars. All through the mining districts miners surged aboard, swamping Eddie and Charles with good wishes and drinks, and at Chocaya we could at last get into our cabin without tripping over the saucepans Eddie had purchased for his friends.

With Chocaya behind us Eddie and Charles felt they were on their way home. Eddie grew more and more excited every mile, and even Charles let off a few expressions indicative of joy. Down the Tupiza valley I sat next to the two of them lapping up their comments.

The sight of green things growing, even the pale grey-green pepper trees excited them, and the grandeur of the valley left them without words. They had not seen it before, having arrived into the country from the west.

Towards the border I began to get jumpy, fearful of some hitch, madly anxious to be off this soil; to be with Pat again. I dared not relax. George seemed a bit on the jumpy side too, and together we fumed at the train's slowness. George said that Bolivia had just offered him a new £1,750,000 contract, but he had refused it. They wanted credit. "I told them," said George, "that if they could afford to pay

cash for the junk they'd had elsewhere they could afford to pay me cash."

"So what?" I asked.

"Nothing. I'm going to sell the Argentine a battleship."

And he did. George was a great little salesman. There were only six of him in the world, he said. They all spoke a dozen languages, and knew their way about.

"I've done some bad journeys," said George bitterly. "But commend me to this. I was nearly frozen last night. I've always thought London to Istambul by rail a bore—ever done that trip?"

I admitted I hadn't.

"A picnic to this," George advised. "You might try it when you get back, and you should hop off round the Baltic. You'll get some stuff."

"Look here, George," I said. "You leave me alone. I have a wife waiting for me in B.A., and two kids in England. That's where I'm bound—pronto!"

Our conversation became domestic, but most of the time we stared out of the windows, cursing the desert, and wiping the dust from the table every few minutes with our sleeves. It was dark when we arrived at Villazon.

Eddie and Charles were busy with their baggage, and George paced the length of the train with me, anxious about formalities, fretting at the delay, peering ahead towards the Argentine border barely two hundred yards away. The whole ghastly futility of the war was heavy on me; my mind whirling with propaganda, and the excitable protestations of innumerable officials. The night was moonless. Here and there lamps showed companies of soldiers, their shoulders hunched in sheer despondence: they appeared not to be interested in anything at all: life or death or discomfort. Groups of Indios waited huddled in camions ready for the long descent into the Chaco—for Villazon was the gateway to the war. Rifle butts jinked on the hard earth in response

to barked words of command, and slowly the camions moved off, jolting, to be absorbed into the darkness.

There was no sound of laughter; no sound of anger; no sound that might have meant interest in anything. There was not even tension in the air; a feeling of emotion. Fuel was simply going to the furnace—and it knew it was fuel, without caring.

“Hell—how would you like to do that ride?” I said to George bitterly. Never before have I felt depression so overpoweringly. I wanted desperately to run, run off that accursed Alti-Plano, fourteen thousand feet up on the roof of the Andes, run down through Jujuy and Salta to the garden of Tucuman where there would be life; men and women going about their business; business of living. The Alti-Plano had become a nightmare, and the last moments were the worst.

Of all the claims, arguments and explanations I had listened to from both sides one set of words beat in my ears so that I laughed. . . .

They fired the first shot! They fired the first shot! And with the words the dark, hawk-like, fanatical face of the young Bolivian peered close to mine as it had done at the President’s house—*They* fired the first shot—you believe that—you believe that. . . .

The man, Paraguayan or Bolivian, who had fired the first shot three long years before was buried beneath a pile of rotting bodies one hundred thousand deep. And what did it matter anyway? No one knew who had fired the first shot; no one could know. They were all dead.

So I waited at Villazon for the military officials to satisfy themselves about me; to let me cross the frontier to La Quiaca and fall asleep as I had not done for weeks, and forget about everything for a little while.

George was fretting and fuming beside me on the cold, bleak station. “What are we waiting for!” he muttered querulously, half to himself, and we explored our consciences

for possible misdemeanours. "I'll be glad to get out of here."

"We'll get out soon," I said, as much to assure myself as George.

Huddled soldiery was even at that moment bumping perilously down the mountains in open camions, and I couldn't help imagining the journey. "The war's about over, don't you think?" said George.

I felt spiteful. "When you coves begin looking elsewhere for trade it's a good sign," I said.

We opened our eyes next morning in Güemes, barely four thousand feet above sea level. So grateful had our minds and bodies been to leave the Alti-Plano that we had slept through the clack of the rack and pinion descent. Now there was air again; trees; and the fair beginnings of a green world.

Headlines four inches deep on the newspapers blared a great Paraguayan victory. Bolivian divisions smashed to pieces around Villa Montes. Terrible slaughter.

"Estigarribia's done it," I said. "I thought it was a forlorn hope. That's the end."

And it was the end. Also it is nearly the end of this book. The events of the next nine weeks (had I known then that there were nine weeks more of worry ahead I would have lain down and cried) before Pat and I had a sight of England and our kids, would be, I think, worth telling. I have seldom lived a more interesting period. But a book must have an end, and I feel it coming.

Without Eddie, Charles and George that train journey would have been hell for me. I would have sat chewing my finger nails, wanting to get out and run at every stop. As it was, George and I watched the delight of the two young miners as we sped down the mountain. First the tall cactus, then scrub, trees, grass, flowers spread away on either side of us. The four of us had the observation car to ourselves, and the green things made the eyes of these starved Alti-Planians

widen with amazement. They hugged each other. They danced around the narrow platform anxious not to miss the sight of a leaf. And the green that was delighting them was a grey-brown. Tucuman sent them wild.

We didn't touch a dice box all the way down until after dark, then we only played for drinks. At Ruis de los Llanos two Indians staged a cock fight, and we bought hot tamales and cheered the combatants. The only bad part about the journey down was the leprous and syphilitic beggars stumping, sightless, dropping to pieces, less than human, up and down the train, and floundering for alms in the dust.

At Tucuman we transferred to the wide gauge Central Argentine train and settled down in comfort to play bridge for the last twenty-five hours. I couldn't sleep that night for excitement. I had wired Pat from Tucuman, and was counting the hours. We were all fairly wrought up with various forms of anxiety and anticipation, and by the time we reached Rosario I had to send another wire.

"Say," said Eddie. "You'll have us all getting married sure as sure if you carry on like this. Let's have a party to-night."

Pat was on the platform. We trailed along together with the queer assortment of stuff I had picked up in Bolivia. We had so much to say we didn't say it. I think that the first moment we really looked at each other was when the hall porter at the Phoenix exclaimed in alarm:

"Why! you're as thin as the señora. You must rest, both of you."

Poor Pat had had a dreadful time. She was pale and ill. Instead of going to Azul she had had a severe bout of fever, temperature sky rocketing, lying delirious and alone, imagining. And only the young hall porter—to whom my everlasting thanks—to care about her. He had nursed her through it.

I was livid with anger. It was only that I knew she was going to Azul that had made me leave her. The only consolation was that the journey to Bolivia would have been too much

for her, and later I was thankful that I had not attempted to take her.

But we soon ceased to care about anything except to be glad that it was all over. Not even money worried us. We had just enough between us to pay our bill. We had spent exactly £100, and we had done all that we had set out to do. To-morrow was another day.

III. ANTI-CLIMAX

I am not abandoning this book willingly. Most of it was a joy in the doing, and a real pleasure in the writing. One of these days, may be, I shall have time to polish the words I write. Now it is always hurry. I don't mind that—except that I know I could do better if I had time. They say you can write best in a garret. Old George would say "piffle" to that. I would write best in a Georgian mansion with Adam fire-places, and twenty, fifty or a hundred thousand a year just there at the bank. So would anyone, I suspect.

But I'm not envious. The writers I envy are R. B. Cunninghame Graham and W. H. Hudson. They knew South America. It is almost too late to know it as they knew it. They felt it: it was in them. So much that I don't suppose they cared what the public thought, or the critics said. They could afford to smile.

I wish sometimes, when I have a warm picture in my mind of light and colour, depth and design, that I had the hours in which to seek and seek the words. If I knew I had written the picture perfectly I would not care—any more than Cunninghame Graham and Hudson cared—what you thought, or the critics said. I would *know*.

To finish my long story:

Nothing went right for us when I arrived back from Bolivia. We had no money. We had a story, we thought (you've read it if you've travelled so far with us). And we weren't worrying more than we could help. The business of

living wasn't easy in Buenos Aires. We were somebodies, unfortunately. We dined with millionaires, and walked the streets meanwhile saving our cents.

But in a way that month was grand. I earned a thousand dollars. Had to. Bluffed like the devil. Had to. But I was tired out. First I gave the papers the story I had promised, and had some satisfaction in that. We rushed around with Eddie; a dance or two at Taboriz; and saw him off on a Munson liner, and nearly went with him. It was just the last straw. I hadn't the energy to go all out for it.

Eddie said: "You're an ad. for marriage you two. Send me the book. I'll be back at Chocaya in six months."

He was a good lad, Eddie. I learned more of trade and the inside stuff on Argentine in that month than I had learned in years before. Don Pablo turned up. I met the biggest men in the continent; lunched and dined with them; made speeches to them on the question of trade promotion with England. Sometimes I could have laughed my head off.

I worked out a propaganda campaign for the selling of Argentine beef. That really saw us through. Each day we expected our ship to have sailing instructions. She was lying out in the river off Rosario waiting to load grain. In the end we thought she would never come in to load.

We made a trip down to Don Pablo's estancia at Azul—Los Angeles—and saw the finest Durham cattle in the world. I could write a small book about Los Angeles, but I don't see it making a fag end of this one.

Perhaps the happiest thing that happened was seeing old Mackinson again. Old Mac. was the drover in my first book about the Argentine. He found us out, and sat with a great grin on his face saying: "Que notable che—you a writer! Que notable!" And he was determined that we should have an *asado* with him. It was a grand *asado* when we had it.

Funny thing—the day before we ate Mac.'s *asado* we had lunch with a millionaire in one of those wrought-iron mansions. This lunch was notable for its exquisite vegetables. Next

day we found Mac. in his back yard tending the *asado*. We ate a sheep whole; a sucking pig whole; a turkey. Gallons of red wine washed it down. No vegetables. That's the difference between rich and poor in the Argentine.

We had a pass on the Mihanovich company and, broke to the wide, made a good trip across to Monte Video. That was fun. We could afford to travel, but we couldn't afford to remain in one place. As near as makes no matter we went back to Paraguay. But we didn't. There were bad times, good times, every sort of time while the month worked slowly to its end. Always there was worry. We had finished travelling. We wanted home.

At last we went down to Rosario to join our 3,000-ton tramp. Up to that moment I had managed, but the Argentine tax of 10 per cent. on the fares of those leaving the country (an iniquitous tax) beat me. It was just too much. I had to cable my long suffering agent for a tenner—£110 in all.

We liked Rosario. It was ten years since I had had a real sight of it. Once we were aboard we didn't care if it snowed, and it did everything but that. We scraped our way over Martin Garcia bar. Terrific head seas hit us hour after hour, day after day, until we saw the coast of Wales. The mate had not known the like of it in seventy-one crossings. Our agent missed us in Liverpool looking for a ship with a black funnel—ours was white with salt.

But I wrote the finish of my novel and wrote the last word of it on the last day. Pat was under the weather all the way home. The skipper thought and said she was a hero to have come with me. She's the hero of this book. I have a vague idea of the things she had to put up with. She wouldn't tell me or you. I think the part of our travel she enjoyed most was the day we had in Porto Grande on the way home. It was such a tremendous relief for her to leave the ship for a few hours, and Porto Grande is as "foreign" and colourful as any place on earth.

But the best day of all was the one on which we awoke to see the sweep of Llandudno bay between the Great and the Little Orme's Heads, and the sea without a ripple. The first real sunshine we knew on the voyage home was in the Manchester Ship canal.

Then we just came along home to the old Greyhound, and saw our kids toddling along the village street. . . .

We didn't care a damn about Mussolini's war in Abyssinia. We didn't even care that the Chaco war was right outside the market, and we couldn't sell an article. We just worked, and had a. . . . One of the dart players has just put his head round the door. I promised to finish my damned book to-night, he says. They're waiting for me to play a "301."

Well, I've finished. A pint of old and mild will taste good.
"Right—I'm coming now——"

Greyhound Inn,
Chalfont St. Peter,
Bucks.

THE CHACO REHEARSAL

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE THREE YEARS' WAR IN THE CHACO

ANY event causing the loss of a hundred thousand lives; the spreading of disease amongst five millions of people; the financial ruin of two countries, with no gain at all to the peoples concerned, is a major catastrophe.

Such a catastrophe has occurred during the last three years in the vast strip of territory bounded by the rivers Paraguay and Pilcomayo, and by the great wall of the Andes.

The war in the Chaco has been the worst calamity in South American history. It excited the intense interest of the two American Continents, while receiving little more than a mention in Great Britain.

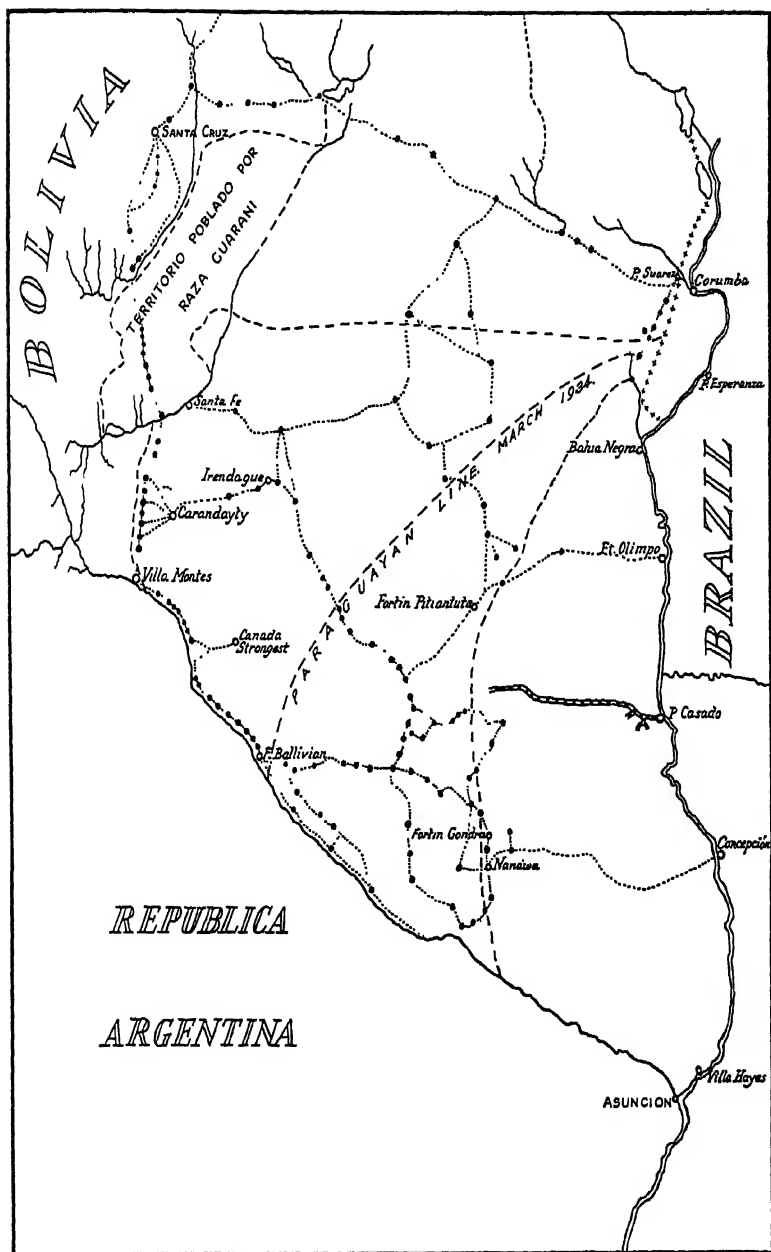
The story of the military progress of the war, the efforts or peace, and the events leading to the final outbreak of hostilities is intensely interesting, especially in view of the Italo-Abyssinia situation and the state of the world.

Talking of these things Mr. Bernard Shaw commented: "The Chaco Rehearsal. That's your title—that's what it was."

So here is a brief summary of The Chaco Rehearsal.

There are several obvious points of similarity in all wars of conquest. By the very nature of the campaign the dice are loaded heavily in favour of the aggressor. The aggressor, since he seeks the fight, chooses the moment for the outbreak of hostilities. He is always superior in all departments of war: he has greater forces, armaments, finances. A feeling of certainty of success forms a natural part of the aggressor's belief. It is this belief that impels him to war.

But this last is the first point in favour of the defender.



THE PROGRESS OF THE WAR

The defender is under few illusions. He is fighting for his home and his family, his very existence. He is, he is sure, in the right. He is, in short, fighting with all the courage and determination present in humanity against an adversary who automatically under-estimates him. Man for man, therefore, the defender is always worth more than the aggressor, especially as the campaign draws out and the first flush of conquest has faded in the hearts of the opposition cannon fodder.

The second factor in favour of the defender is the scene of battle. He is on his home ground; he knows every inch of it in a way that all the preliminary reconnoitring of the enemy cannot equal; the ground gives him life—water, and food, and cover. These things are often denied the aggressor. Particularly is this true in regard to the Gran Chaco, and in regard to Abyssinia.

In these instances, Bolivia in the Chaco and Italy in Abyssinia, the aggressor was, and must be, faced by extraordinary difficulties of communication; by severe climatic hardships, and a natural inability to take full advantage of the contours and coverings of the land.

I. LEADING TO WAR

Bolivia's claims to the Chaco territory are historic. Her propaganda brigade have immersed themselves deep in ancient Spanish archives; in rulings of such bodies as the "Audiencia de Charcas"; in the tracks of the Jesuits across the Chaco; in the territories assigned to the old Spanish Vice-Regents, and numerous other data that go back even to the records of the ancient Inca race.

On my visit to Bolivia I was overwhelmed with such historic arguments, and a mass of literature that I have read thoroughly. I do not think that all or any of these historic facts and fancies have any bearing on the argument that at last culminated in a frightful and useless war.

Quite frankly I expressed this view to the President and Ministers of Bolivia. "I am prepared to admit all your historic claims," I said, "but all previous arguments are discounted by Paraguay's open sale and development of the Chaco and by the Hayes award. That was your time to state your claims—not fifty years later."

The best reply they gave me to that was: "Well—we weren't in a position at the time to say anything."

I thought that was sheer nonsense, and said so.

Another suggestion of the Bolivians was that the Chaco is geologically a part of the Andine system and has no geological connection with the eastern system of which Paraguay is a part. I am not a geologist; but my observations showed me that the Chaco territory differed utterly from both east and west. An old geologist said to me, before I crossed the Paraguay river: "You are going a few hundred yards—but you are going to another world." And he was right.

The Chaco is low lying in the fork of the great Paraguay river and the lesser Pilcomayo. There is not a rock or a stone in the whole of its dusty surface. Its palms are different from the palms of Paraguay. The nature of the country is quite different. Its native Indians appear to have no connection outwardly with the Paraguayan Guarani race or the Bolivian Quechuas and Aymaras. The Chaco is like no other region on earth. It is a country; a system of its own. It appears to have been at one time a vast inland lake or sea in the confluence of the rivers that now hold it in their fork.

But even this argument is outweighed, in the way I see the whole question, by the undoubted fact of Paraguayan undisputed development during the last fifty years. Bolivia's time to state her claims was in 1878. Not in 1932.

It is only fair to say that Paraguay has provided an almost equal volume of literature dealing with all these ancient rights, and that it would constitute a very long and interesting study to follow all the arguments and counter-arguments. At the end of it all—although one would have added greatly to one's

knowledge of an absorbing subject, and might be amazed at the extraordinary efforts of the Jesuits and at the customs and beginnings of the native tribes in this almost unknown territory—one would not have advanced one step nearer the rights and wrongs of the Chaco war.

The reasons for the war and for Bolivia's failure to make her claims at the proper time are sufficiently clear.

In her disastrous and stupid war against Chile, Bolivia lost the whole of her coastline, and from that moment another war became a certainty. A nation as wealthy and as large as Bolivia cannot be held indefinitely bottled up inside South America, and since the day she lost her coast her whole aim has been to find an outlet to the sea.

Her obvious outlet is, of course, the one she lost on the west coast. For years she has been using Arica, Antogafasta and Mollendo, but with certain limitations imposed by the Chilean and Peruvian Governments. These limitations are slight, and perhaps only noticeable in time of war. At best, however, they are not the same as a Bolivian port.

Bolivia having once tried her strength against the powerful and growing Chile was not prepared to do so a second time. Where else might she try?

Hundreds of miles from her eastern boundaries at the foot of the Andes, across the huge desolate tract of the Gran Chaco lies the broad navigable causeway of the Paraguay river leading to the South Atlantic. The Pilcomayo, where it leaves Bolivia at Villa Montes, is no more than a muddy stream. Away northwards, opposite the Brazilian township of Corumba on the Paraguay river, Bolivia has a small outlet known as Puerto Suarez. This serves only when the river is in flood. It is at best only available for small shallow-draft vessels, and even then is nearly two thousand miles from the sea through Paraguay and Argentine. Bolivia was obsessed by the idea that a proper port on the Paraguay river would solve her problems; and that is what she was determined to have.

I could understand this great and urgent need of landlocked

Bolivia, but suggested to her President and Ministers that, given a port on the Paraguay river, there would still be the difficulty of transport from Bolivia to the port. This difficulty is almost unsurmountable. It would mean either the building of roads across nearly a thousand miles of lowland which is devoid of stone or rock; or the construction of a railroad. It would mean also a corridor through Paraguayan territory—presuming Bolivia failed in her attempted conquest of the Chaco.

And at the end of it all the problem would not be solved. Just as the Argentine by her command of the river mouth keeps Paraguayan export trade under her thumb so too would she with Bolivia. All ports and steamers are either Argentine or Paraguayan.

At great length I argued these points with people in Bolivia, and in the end they said: "Well—what we really want is a port on the west coast."

"So that," I said, "is why you fight Paraguay in the Chaco?"

Ridiculous it sounds; but nearly true.

The next point, and, at least, a great contributory incentive to war, and to the long and fierce prosecution of war, and likewise adding to the difficulties of the peace, is the presence of oil in the Chaco.

Oil always takes the popular fancy, and throughout Argentine and Paraguay you will hear that oil was the sole cause of war in the Gran Chaco, and that Bolivia was financed by the Standard Oil Company of Bolivia.

Senator Huey Long of Louisiana helped this view considerably in his accusing speech in the United States Senate on May 30th, 1934. In that speech Senator Huey Long stated that the Standard Oil Company of New York promoted and financed the war, and laid his "proofs" before the Senate.

The ramifications of the Standard Oil Company of New York are so immense, coupled with their banking interests, that from an inspection and investigation in Bolivia I could not hope to discover what this powerful company did or did not do. But

I do know that the Standard Oil Company of Bolivia did nothing.

It is clear, however, that the mere presence of oil hastened and intensified the struggle, and will, perhaps, delay and intensify the arguments that must prelude a satisfactory and lasting peace.

From 1924* onwards there was a good deal of secrecy veiling the movements of oil prospectors in the region around Villa Montes, and this secrecy easily deepened in the public mind to mystery. Oil was found in Bolivian territory around Villa Montes, and it was known that numerous bores had been sunk and sealed in the Chaco. It was also believed that the oil might follow the fall of the land eastwards down the line of the Pilcomayo.

The question of whether this is mainly belief or reality does not much matter. Belief is as good as reality, until the truth is discovered. At any rate, an outlet for the oil would have to be found, and an oleoduct through to the Paraguay river was the obvious route. There was, of course, the line of the Argentine North Eastern Railway, anxious enough to freight the oil. But in that case there were the Argentine Government's royalty demands as well as the freight rates to contend with.

That, briefly, was the situation leading finally to war in June 1932.

For many years Bolivia had paid great attention to the training and development of her army. The young men were trained by German methods, and there had been the importation of several tried German officers. At the same time Bolivia looked to her armaments. Messrs. Vickers-Armstrong as well as Skodas, Brunos, Bosfors and various other European and American companies divided the spoils, so that in 1932 Bolivia boasted a standing army of 80,000 men, well officered, and equipped with the finest arms and light artillery the world produces. In addition she also possessed several fighting aeroplanes of American and English origin, and twelve tanks.

Naturally enough the possession of this army had much the

* I was in South America during 1925/6.

same effect on the Bolivians that the possession of an air gun has on a small boy: they wanted to kill something with it. Chile they knew to their cost was a tough nut. Far across the Chaco was Paraguay, a poor nation, having under one million inhabitants one might have supposed to be war sickened. Also, Paraguay, being without wealth, was without an army or armaments.

During the ten years all this was brewing, Paraguay had been so taken up with internal affairs, with the bickerings and demonstrations, so often misleadingly called "revolutions," somewhat common to the South American form of government, that she was uninformed.

Paraguay was clearly the "game."

The late President Salamanca, gauging the pride and spirit of the Bolivian army, stepped to presidential power on a definite policy of war. Through the years immediately preceding the outbreak, Salamanca had sent his scouting parties into the Chaco with instructions to build forts, and to stop whenever they came to a Paraguayan settlement.

In discussing these operations with President Tejada Sorzino in La Paz I said: "But surely this was calculated to result in trouble?"

You must remember that President Tejada and his Ministers were naturally enough explaining to me how Paraguay was the aggressor (the "*they* fired the first shot" business).

"Ah," said President Tejada, "but our men had definite instructions not to start anything——"

I smiled faintly: "Simply to build forts opposite Paraguayan forts and sit down in peace," I observed.

"Precisely," said the President, ignoring any double meaning that might have crept into my words.

At any rate, once war became an accomplished fact President Tejada—then Vice-President—did his uttermost to curb his chief, Salamanca.

"I pleaded with Salamanca to let me go and talk with my old friend President Ayala of Paraguay—we had been good

friends in Washington," he told me. " But I wasn't allowed to go."

There is no doubt that both before and after the fall of Salamanca, Tejada Sorzino made every effort for peace—consistent with honour. Paraguayan victories made this less and less possible.

The position of Paraguay in the years leading to the war was, as I have said, one of considerable political unrest. She was in these years so taken up with her own affairs that it is doubtful if she had a glimmer of an idea of what was brewing for her up in the Bolivian mountains. Certain it is that she was entirely unprepared for war. Completely impoverished in men and money by the disastrous war of Francisco Lopez in 1870 against the combined might of Brazil, Argentine and Uruguay, she was thinking of economic development and the populating of her territory. After the war of '70 there was not a male in Paraguay above the age of fourteen, and from that condition, in sixty years, she could not have recovered.

Practically devoid of minerals, possessing only a soil which is one of the most fertile in the world, she was without money; a tiny nation deep in the heart of South America.

It is ridiculous to suggest that Paraguay impoverished as she had been, and still was in 1932, considered a war of conquest in the Chaco or any kind of war at all. The Chaco she considered to be hers. Nearly 2,000,000 head of cattle, English and Argentine owned, were grazing over huge tracts of it; nine factories of various kinds were working at full pressure; at Puerto Casado, above Concepcion, the Quebracho company had constructed a metre gauge railroad 165 kilometres inland for freighting timber; twenty-one colonies of Mennonites numbering 6,000 inhabitants were established, and there were numerous Christian Missions even in the most outlying parts. All of these people under Paraguayan protection.

The missionaries, in fact, brought to Asuncion the first news of Bolivian " peaceful penetration," and there is no doubt that Paraguay would have been prepared to cede a large portion of

the western half of the Chaco to Bolivia. She was not in a position to defend it anyway.

In 1932 Paraguay had an army of 3,000 men. They were badly uniformed and armed with 25-year-old Argentine rifles. The younger Paraguayans had not received European military training. Several of the luckier among them had benefited from courses in the Argentine Military Academy, and of these young Jose Felix Estigarribia was destined to lead his countrymen to victory.

Such was the Paraguayan army and armament on the outbreak of war in 1932; and no money or time to do anything much about it. The stage is almost set for the slaughter. It remains only to examine the disposition of the "interested parties," since there was never a real danger that any other country might be drawn into the war as a fighting ally.

The question is: Which outside countries would lose or gain by a conquest of the Chaco, or by a conquest of Paraguay proper? A conquest of Bolivia not being a possibility.

In regard to the Chaco itself, on the Bolivian side there was only the Standard Oil Company and its possible interests that might have tended to make the United States a backer of Bolivia. In addition, United States interests are very great over the majority of Western South American countries. Beyond this U.S.A. could not be really concerned.

Of Bolivia's western neighbours, Peru, an old ally allowing Bolivia to use the port of Mollendo, would be friendly, but economically disinterested. Chile, an old enemy, permitting the use of Antofagasta and Arica, would be friendly—especially as the gaining of a port by Bolivia on the Paraguay river would ease any claims on her own coastline. Even so, Chile's possible help would be no more than moral, plus the permitting of war supplies through her territory.

On the north-east from Brazil, Bolivia might hope for a little more. The two countries had recently concluded satisfactorily various boundary disputes, and Brazil had agreed to pay Bolivia £1,000,000 sterling for the construction of a railway from Santa

Cruz to Puerto Grether on the river Ichilo. Brazil, too, might hope for Bolivian success inasmuch as it would tend to modify Argentine domination of the Paraguay river, and cause discomfiture to Argentina.

By this route we arrive at the sole keenly interested party, and on the side of Paraguay.

In regard to the Chaco itself Argentina would be interested only inasmuch as conquest might concern the holdings of her nationals, and disturb her river interests. Also—a minor point—all hopes of her North Eastern railway freighting oil, and her own collection of royalties, would disappear.

Beyond this the position of the Argentine becomes far more European, and repercussive. While a conquest of the Chaco would prove annoying, a conquest of Paraguay proper was unthinkable, quite apart from economic interests. For years relations between Argentina and Brazil have been definitely bad, and even now, since the terrific reception of President Vargas in Buenos Aires it is doubtful whether they are much better. These "fête-ings" and cheering mobs are apt to prove misleading, as we know well in Europe.

Between Brazil and Argentina, then, Paraguay serves as a most useful buffer state which Argentina would go to great lengths to maintain.

Against the friendly relations of various nations towards Bolivia, and the possible financial assistance (which she could not really need) of the United States—or U.S. interests, Paraguay had the very definite backing of the Argentine Republic.

1932 is drawing on to mid-year. Non-aggression pacts in regard to Chaco disputes are being argued in Washington.

And now the war begins. . . .

II. WAR.—THE "FIRST SHOT"

In June 1932 someone fired a gun at Pitiantuta a few miles north-west of the Casado Railway track, and war was a reality in the Gran Chaco,

It is always easy to argue without fear of correction that the first shot begins war, and that without it war might be averted. I doubt it. War is so long in the hatching that the first shot becomes inevitable. Without the war machinery ready, war could not follow.

There had, for example, been many first shots in the Chaco before this final "first shot" brought the avalanche of war in its wake. The time had not been ripe until that moment at Pitiantuta.

The actual beginning of the Chaco war, shrouded as it is in a maze of cross propaganda, is worth examining. I believe that the outbreak of Pitiantuta precipitated events rather before Bolivia intended. The Conference of Neutrals was still discussing the proposed non-aggression pact under the auspices of the United States in Washington. Probably Paraguay suspected that no good could come to her out of that. The choice of arbitrators was too transparent to fool anyone—the United States, Mexico, Colombia, Cuba, and Uruguay. All these countries, with the sole exception of Uruguay, under America's thumb. At any moment these "disinterested" nations might have put forward proposals that Paraguay would have had to refuse, thus giving Bolivia some appearance of right in the eyes of the world when she chose to fight.

I am also inclined to the belief that Bolivia had very few troops concentrated in the Chaco in 1932. All through that year she had been busy encroaching under cover of the Conference, and was constructing small fortins as fast as she could.

The general manager of the Bolivian railways—an Englishman—assured me in La Paz that Bolivia had only 2,000 men in Chaco territory. Very probably he is right. It would have been madness to attempt the maintenance of an army so far from home until that army was ready to strike.

Consideration of these points supports Bolivia's accusation against Paraguay in the matter of the "first shot." But to say they prove it is assuming a far greater knowledge of affairs in a



ESTIGARRIBIA WITH TWO OF HIS STAFF

See p. 426



CASADO RAILROAD IN THE CHACO. USEFUL TO PARAGUAY IN EARLY DAYS OF THE WAR

Facing p. 426

common soldier, isolated with two or three companions in a small Chaco fortin, than he would possess.

There could have been nothing planned or deliberate about the beginning. It was a natural outcome of events; of the "peaceful penetration" practised by Bolivia. Imagine:

A small Paraguayan fortin, garrisoned by a sergeant and two men. A small Bolivian fortin a few hundred yards away, holding a garrison of perhaps a score. A small laguna supplying water to both garrisons. What more natural than that two soldiers of opposed nations meeting at the same water-hole should squabble? Perhaps one shouts an insult. There is a shot. . . .

Without difficulty the superior garrisons of the Bolivians overcame the Paraguayans, and the war had begun. Paraguay at once withdrew her delegates from Washington, and mustered as best she could to recapture her small fortin, and to strive desperately for some advantage before the Bolivians had time to mass.

The situation at the outbreak enabled Paraguay to utilize the short Casado railroad for the carriage of troops and supplies, and within a few days volunteers from Concepcion and Asuncion were rushing to the scene of war.

These first troops of Paraguay went into the Chaco ununiformed, unshod, and, for the most part, unarmed but for the long-bladed heavy machetes that are almost a part of a Paraguayan body. All my inquiries have supported this. It is estimated the Paraguayans had at the most only one rifle to every three men, and these rifles so old that they proved nearly as dangerous to the men who fired them as to those fired upon.

Bolivia herself in her propaganda accuses Paraguay of infringing the "rules of warfare"—amusing term!—by putting civilians into the field. There was no such thing as a civilian man in Paraguay. Soldiers didn't possess uniforms simply because there weren't any—nor money to buy them.

Meanwhile the Bolivian forces moved swiftly southward almost parallel with the Paraguay river, and easily took the small fortins, Corrales, Toledo and Boqueron.

It seems clear that if Bolivia had had the forces in the Chaco that are claimed for her she must have marched right through to Asuncion. Taking into consideration the great valour of the opposition, and their natural knowledge of the country, it is not credible that a handful of men, poorly armed, could seriously check the advance of a well-armed force in the circumstances.

In marching southwards and taking Boqueron the Bolivian commander clearly wished to dig himself in and await the arrival of the main army under the German General Kundt. There was scarcely a doubt in the mind of any observer that the Paraguayans would then be crushed.

Doubtless, too, the Bolivians, miles from their bases, were scared of an offensive proving their immediate weakness in face of a desperate enemy, receiving reinforcements almost hourly.

The Paraguayans realized the position, and made a desperate bid to overpower the enemy so that by capturing their arms they would have something to fight with when the main army arrived. Speed was absolutely vital to all hopes of Paraguayan success. They had to attack, and attack they did.

By the 15th of July, one month after the outbreak, the Paraguayans retook Pitiantuta. These small fortins were little better than mud huts, without armaments, and garrisoned with two or three soldiers. The Bolivians, however, had been busy fortifying their captured fortins so that with the arrival of the Paraguayans they presented a much more formidable aspect.

During these weeks the neutrals in Washington continued to formulate peace proposals that proved unacceptable to one side or the other. I hope to make the constant rejection of the peace suggestions clear without going deeply into the actual terms.

The Bolivians felt that once their highly trained troops, efficiently commanded, and well armed, came on the scene it would be all up with Paraguay. As a result Bolivia was not inclined to accept the slightest modification in their pre-war demands. Paraguay, determined to defend herself to the last man, would not concede an inch. Also she was mistrustful of

the Bolivians: her one chance lay in forcing a decisive battle before the main army arrived. Once before Bolivia had encroached under cover of the Conference. An armistice, therefore, might well have spelt Paraguay's ruin had a new discussion failed.

In these circumstances the peace moves of the first few weeks were doomed to failure.

On August 1st the Bolivians made their demands clear—demands that had not been uttered before, and destroyed any tenable basis of discussion, and all hopes of a settlement. The Bolivian note stated that they would defend territory they considered their own historically, and ended: “Tenemos derechos al litoral del rio Paraguay.” Claiming the whole territory of the Gran Chaco to the banks of the Paraguay river as their own.

That was that.

On the 3rd of August the Commission of Neutrals proposed a return to the positions of the 1st of June—before the outbreak—and a reopened discussion. Bolivia refused to evacuate their positions. They would discuss peace, but “neither the Government nor the sentiment of the Nation” would permit them to abandon their positions.

This at least saved Paraguay a rather difficult refusal, and put her again in the right.

III. FIRST PHASE

During August several Bolivian fighting planes flew over the scene of war, and dropped bombs, but they did not succeed in harassing the Paraguayans to any extent. Aeroplanes operating over a jungle territory such as the Chaco, in which small numbers of men are employing guerilla tactics, are of little service. There was almost nothing to destroy.

In this month of August the Bolivian mountain peasants had their first real taste of the hardships they were destined to suffer. The heat, with its attendant mosquitos and pulverins, was

beginning to envelop the Chaco like a pall, and with it, water became the predominant necessity.

Unaccustomed to the "Montes"—or forest country—Bolivian reconnoitring parties suffered severely from the "jitters." Every palm, every tree, might, and often did, mask the lean fierce body of a Paraguayan. Small parties, losing touch with the main body, were often cut to pieces, before they had time to make use of their rifles, by Paraguayans armed with the terrible machetes.

The Chaco is a disturbing country. There is much of it that gives the impression of being fairly open; one feels that one can see a good distance on all sides. Palms straggle up out of the tall esparto grass, their bulbous heads drooping on slender pole-like trunks. Always it seems that presently there will be a clearing. And there isn't. The effect it had on me was almost that of peering through misty glasses, or of defective eyesight. A constant struggling to see just a little farther and more clearly.

For the Cholos and Quechuas of the Bolivian Alti-Plano the jungle must have held real horror. The ghosts they imagined often proved reality. It is not in the least surprising that on numberless occasions, finding themselves surrounded, they laid down their arms and surrendered to greatly inferior forces.

The constant search for water, and the small attacks the Bolivians were forced by necessity to launch on the wells and water holes, ended frequently in disaster.

Inexorably the Paraguayans pursued their guerilla methods, intent on arming themselves with the enemy's weapons at all costs. On the first day of September they launched their first real open attack on the fortifications of Boqueron. By that time they had captured sufficient rifles to make success likely. There was no time to be lost, and such was the fury of their attack that Boqueron fell.

The Bolivian troops had little stomach for the business, and none whatever for cold steel in the shape of machetes. Such training as they had had in soldiering was simply a veneer

upon them. They seemed not to realize fully the immense power in such a weapon as a machine-gun. Confronted with a score or so of wild shouting figures rising out of the tall grass brandishing the murderous machetes, many a machine-gun crew abandoned their weapon and took to their heels. There were many such occasions when calmness and determination would have resulted in the enemy being mown down.

"They did not seem to realize the value of machine-guns," a Paraguayan officer told me. "At twenty metres they would cease fire and run in face of twenty or thirty men."

Four hundred captured machine-guns, many of which I inspected, bore witness to this statement.

On the other hand the Bolivian officers fought with great courage; majors, captains, colonels, and the like rushing to man the guns when the common soldiers failed. It was a tragedy for Bolivia, accounting for the loss of officers out of all proportion to the fighting. Many an officer was cut to pieces, a lone hand, operating a machine-gun deserted by his men.

The fall of Boqueron marked the climax of what must be called the first Paraguayan offensive, and with it war materials in considerable quantities fell into their hands, as well as a large number of prisoners. At a moderate estimate there were also two thousand Bolivian dead at this time.

Swiftly the Paraguayans followed up their advantage and advanced upon the base the Bolivians had established at "Arce." Here, they knew, an even greater prize of arms would await victory. Corrales and Toledo were recaptured and with them several small Bolivian fortins. All these successes helped to swell the accumulation of armaments and prisoners. The Bolivians were not fighting to the death if they could avoid it; many were found wandering aimlessly in the Montes, and swollen bodies, testifying to the lack of water, became common.

The huge number of prisoners in Paraguay, a number out of all proportion to the forces engaged, shows that the Bolivians could have had little heart for the business.

The Bolivians, however, were learning to leave destruction in their tracks, burning and destroying whenever their fierce opponents gave them time.

By the middle of October the Paraguayan force, now moderately well armed and numbering perhaps 5,000 men, faced the Bolivian base of "Arce," and on the 23rd of October this important base fell into their hands.

This victory really marked the end of the Paraguayan offensive; an offensive that was not to be renewed for nearly a year.

After each victory the Paraguayans invariably followed up the enemy, massacring the stragglers or taking them prisoners as they retreated through the Montes. By this time the forces of nature were taking toll of both sides. Bolivians were dying of thirst and the terrible conditions, and the hospitals and sanitary arrangements were of the crudest. The rough surgery that hundreds of wounded had to suffer in the field dressing stations is beyond contemplation.

A kind of yellow gloom pervaded the field hospitals under canvas; the stench of ether combining with the heat so that even in full possession of strength and senses a man would suffer a drowning sensation; a partial anæsthesia.

Probably in these early days the Paraguayans suffered more than their opponents in all but thirst. The Indian of the *Alti-Plano* has a stoical quality in suffering, while the Paraguayan is far more sensitive.

"Arce" proved a real prize, and the loss was serious for Bolivia, even though her main army had yet to arrive. There was abundant water at Arce, and apart from the armaments that fell into Paraguayan hands they were also able to salvage a good quantity of sanitary and hospital gear that the Bolivians had failed to destroy.

"Arce" had not fallen a moment too soon for Paraguay. In November the superior forces of Bolivia began to make themselves felt. The Paraguayans, it was believed, had shot their bolt, and it would be the Bolivian turn to take the offensive.

But much valuable time had been lost, and the Paraguayan army under Jose Felix Estigarribia had taken full advantage. Warfare on a much larger scale was about to begin.

In December the German general, Hans Kundt, assumed complete command of the Bolivian army, now arrived in force, and concentrated against Nanawa and Gondra—the road to the river. General Kundt himself with his staff established headquarters at Muñoz to direct the offensive.

Young Estigarribia was under no illusion as to the power of his enemy. Probably he was not without qualms. Against him was a famous man, skilled and tried in European warfare; a man in command of a powerful army backed by light artillery, “75’s” and “105’s,” trench mortars, grenades, and all the machines of war. Also the morale of the Bolivian troops would be considerably strengthened by the presence of their German general.

Grimly Estigarribia prepared to defend the road. He had established his general headquarters at Islâ Poi, and with him were the flower of Paraguayan youth and the bravest in the land. From Asuncion had come a band of students calling themselves the “Aca me quedo yo” (here I stop) and from Concepcion the two regiments Aca Vera and Aca Caraya* that were to cover themselves in glory.

Such was the position at the end of the year 1932. War remained undeclared, and the Commission of Neutrals ceased its ineffectual efforts in Washington.

IV. NANAWA—BOLIVIA’S “BIG PUSH”

Efforts towards peace now passed into the hands of the A.B.C.P.—Argentine, Brazil, Chile and Peru—but the war in the Chaco was beyond outside control. The forces of the warring nations, it seemed, had to be spent in this terrific blood-letting before peace would become a possibility.

Also, it may be imagined that the A.B.C.P. found some difficulty in agreeing amongst themselves.

* Guaraní names, meaning Shining Heads and Monkey Heads.

With the New Year, General Hans Kundt launched the full strength of the Bolivian army against the positions occupied by the Paraguayans at Nanawa. He attacked in German fashion; his infantry advancing in massed formation covered by light artillery fire and fighting planes. But his simple mountain Indian troops lacked the soldier instinct. Raked by the cool determined fire of the enemy, and decimated by the machine-guns, it was not in them to keep together; to see these great gaps bored into their lines, their fellow men falling in heaps, while they marched on.

The Bolivian losses in these days, until General Kundt eased his methods, were terrific. Perhaps he was cursing his troops as they must have been cursing him.

Time and again through the months that followed the preponderating weight of his forces must have broken the Paraguayan line if they had possessed just that strengthening of determination a real feeling of right might have given them. But the Cholos and Quechuas are not robots. They didn't know what it was all about. Propaganda was mostly over their heads, failing to sow the seeds of hatred against the enemy. Simply, they hated it all.

The Paraguayans have claimed this failure of the Bolivians as an example of the failure of European war methods in jungle or desert territory. Naturally enough they are intensely proud of their local product, Estigarribia.

They are only partly right. European methods applied by European troops would, I think, have won. Nevertheless, I do think General Kundt's tactics showed the mistake of trying to teach wild native races methods essentially foreign to their natures. The Paraguayans fought naturally. From a European point of view there was little discipline, but there was strict obedience coupled with a complete faith in the commander and the cause. It was always sufficient to explain the objective and leave the execution to the soldiers.

All through the war whatever the Paraguayans set out to do they did, or died. Not once were they surrounded—as the

Bolivians frequently were—and brought to surrender. I think it is quite likely that had Paraguay held the “advantages” of Bolivia in military training and commanders her troops would have been badly hampered and much less effective.

As a test of methods the Bolivian offensive against Nanawa and Gondra was interesting. As an example of heroism and appalling slaughter it was an epic.

On the 20th of January General Kundt sent his regiments against Nanawa, and by the 24th the Paraguayans, their ammunition practically exhausted, dared a counter-attack with machetes. They were in desperate case. A squadron of the regiment Aca Vera led the attack, destroying a complete regiment of infantry and returning with valuable spoils in guns and ammunition. Ammunition, at this stage, had become even more important than guns.

The Paraguayans could barely hold their own. The supplies of captured ammunition could not last out an intensive defence spread over weeks or months, and if the line broke the Bolivians would have the road to the river, and command of the Chaco. Without doubt it would have been an unhappy tenancy for the Bolivians, harassed by Paraguay's guerilla bands, and would have greatly postponed a definite settlement of the Chaco question.

But all efforts of General Kundt proved unavailing.

I have been a good deal in the Nanawa region, meeting soldiers who took part in the battles, and Englishmen who watched the progress of the fight. From these men I learned of the great courage shown by the Paraguayan troops, and realized how near they had been to defeat. They were well aware that everything depended on their withstanding this first shock of Bolivia's might.

There was a time at Nanawa when the defenders were reduced to thirty rounds of ammunition per man, and Estigarribia issued the command that every shot must tell, and that no man was to fire until the enemy was within thirty metres.

The effect of this command on the attacking Bolivian

infantry must have been disturbing: to advance in utter silence without a shot against them. The intensity of these moments, both for those who held their fire, and those who waited, must have been very great.

Meanwhile Paraguay had obtained—doubtless with the help of the Argentine—small supplies of rifles and ammunition from Belgian sources. For several weeks three old aeroplanes, scarcely airworthy, flew constantly between Concepcion and the front line, keeping up supplies just about as fast as they were used. At last two of these planes crashed from sheer exhaustion on the banks of the Paraguay river.

By then the Paraguayans had ridden the storm, and in mid-February enjoyed a respite. While Estigarribia's hopes must have been rising high, General Hans Kundt in his headquarters at Muñoz were sorely troubled. His position was certainly unenviable. His troops had suffered appalling losses, and often proved uncontrollable. Sometimes they advanced too far, lured by the enemy to whom captures were essential, and other times they would hold back. With each failure the morale of his Bolivians—never strong—sank considerably, and that of the Paraguayans increased. His Bolivian regiments of horse had proved utterly ineffective, and the difficulties of water and pasture—apart from the task of keeping a horse fit to ride through a Chaco summer—turned his troopers into foot soldiers.

To add to the German General's troubles the flower of his troops—the men, had he had enough of them, who might have brought victory—were dead. Young regiments of Bolivian youth; students from La Paz corresponding to the "aca me quedo yo" from Asuncion, had been wiped out; reward of their bravery.

It seems clear that the failure of these first attacks on Nanawa in the first few months of the fighting were the real turning point of the war. They were, at least, the end of Bolivia's hopes to win to the littoral of the Paraguay river, and the beginning of the end of her hopes for the Chaco.

Nevertheless it had been touch and go for the Paraguayans,

and was to remain so until the autumn of the year. In much the same manner our own "Old Contemptibles" stemmed the German tide in the early days of the Great War, and really frustrated their hopes of victory.

Through March, April, May and June the two armies faced each other without any great movement. It was a period of surprise attacks, counter-attacks and raids, in which the Paraguayans excelled, and in a moderate way added to their war materials.

But the next move still remained with General Kundt. A Paraguayan offensive was not a possibility, and Estigarribia waited patiently for the second big push, knowing well that it must come, and fail, before he dared take the initiative.

On the 10th of May the Paraguayan Government showed its temper and officially declared a state of war with Bolivia, in order, as she said, to regularize affairs in the Chaco. It was a little late, but in its way, coming from Paraguay, it was a courageous gesture.

V. THE TIDE TURNS

In July, strengthened by the arrival of tanks and reinforcements of artillery, the German General was ready to smash his way through the Paraguayan defences. The news of his previous setbacks had been well tempered for the people of Bolivia, and translated into territorial gains, if not outright victories. Little of the depression in the Bolivian soldiers, suffering the rigours of the Chaco, was felt by the civilian population. Nanawa and Gondra had certainly proved stubborn, but now they would break.

Probably the arrival of the strange-looking tanks and the field guns gave new heart to the Bolivian troops. Through the winter General Kundt had made his preparations with the utmost care. With him were the Bolivian Generals Peñeranda and Quintinilla, and his prestige was at stake. It was vitally necessary for this second attempt to be decisive.

It was, in fact, hard to visualize failure, even admitting the superiority of the Paraguayans in any kind of hand to hand combat. This time General Kundt attempted the demoralization of the enemy before anything in the nature of hand to hand combat came about.

On the 4th of July the Bolivians unleashed a severe artillery bombardment against Nanawa and followed at once with a powerful attack of infantry supported by tanks, flame throwers and bombing planes. This was the first time the Paraguayans had seen tanks, but they were not disconcerted.

The battle that followed was probably the most determined and deadly of the whole war, and at the end of the day the Paraguayan defences remained unbroken. Two tanks had been destroyed, and the ground fronting the Paraguayan positions was a shambles, thick with dead and dying.

In some sections between Nanawa and Gondra the Bolivians had gained some ground, but the possession of these few positions was more of a danger to the Bolivians than to their enemies, whose knowledge of the country helped them in flanking movements.

General Kundt's message to the press claiming a gain of more than 2,000 metres of "trincheras"—small trenches—created scenes of enthusiasm in Bolivia. The report gave a very false impression, and the enthusiasm was short lived.

For six days the Bolivians returned again and again to the attack without making an impression on the enemy. The cost of these attacks was also proving immense.

Then, at last, the tide began to turn. Estigarribia chose the psychological moment, and on the 11th of July, quoting Napoleon's theory—that attack is the best form of defence—he directed the first real Paraguayan counter-attack, breaking the Bolivian front line.

All through July and August both sides strove desperately for a definite advantage. Fierce fighting, attack and counter-attack, raged over the whole front, and the Paraguayans slowly gained in strength as the enemy weakened.

It would only tend to muddle the reader to give the names of the various fortins and positions that were constantly changing hands. For at each change of occupation a change of name usually occurred. One fortin, in the course of a few weeks, would often enjoy three or four baptisms.

Moreover, the purpose of these chapters is to do no more than show the general course of the war, and make it clear how increasingly difficult was the task of the workers towards peace.

It was not until the first week in September that Colonel Estigarribia felt the time was ripe to take the initiative, and begin a second Paraguayan offensive after nearly nine months of defensive fighting.

During these months General Kundt had flung his troops with ever increasing desperation against the patient Paraguayan front. It must have been clear to him that once his offensive ceased his last real chance of a decisive victory would go with it. His losses had been at least four times those of the Paraguayans, and his losses of war materials enormous. Even his tanks had been destroyed or captured, and one cannot help feeling that it was as much a failure of the men under him as a tactical failure for him.

As the war progressed it became evident that the main urge of the harassed Bolivians was to get out of the fight as best they could. Even the propaganda which reported the practice of terrible atrocities on prisoners held by the Paraguayans failed to deter them. Out of the frying-pan into the fire it might prove, but they were prepared to chance the "Hell" they didn't know for the hell they knew too well.

I cannot find it in me to blame them. Knowing the heat and vegetation of the Chaco, and also the cold barren Alti-Plano I feel that only the world's finest troops could have been expected to keep their morale. It is certainly true that the Chaco itself was Bolivia's greatest enemy.

In pointing this out I do not want to detract from the masterly campaign conducted by the young Paraguayan

Colonel Estigarribia. It is no reflection on him or the merit of the men under him that the Chaco was his ally. He took every possible advantage his great knowledge of the country gave him.

A story a Paraguayan soldier told me of how, with half a dozen comrades armed with machetes, he captured one of the enemy tanks, seems worth recounting. The Paraguayans stalked the steel monster as it lumbered awkwardly through the jungle. The heat was so intense that the inside of the tank must have been equivalent to a hot oven. At last—as the Paraguayans knew must happen—the door of the tank was opened. The men inside could bear it no longer, and the jungle seemed as utterly empty to them as only the “Green Hell” of the Chaco can.

Within a minute of opening the door the unfortunate Bolivians were prisoners; too greatly surprised by the sudden appearance of the enemy to do much in defence. Besides, the jungle that hid these half-dozen Paraguayans might easily hide many more. The Bolivians were nearly as much out of their element as fish on land.

It was Estigarribia's business to surprise and capture the enemy rather than kill, and it will be understood, by this incidental example, how the Chaco helped him. Already he had begun to visualize a real success for his country, and this success lay in the proper equipment and armament of his troops. Guerilla warfare alone could never drive the enemy from the Chaco.

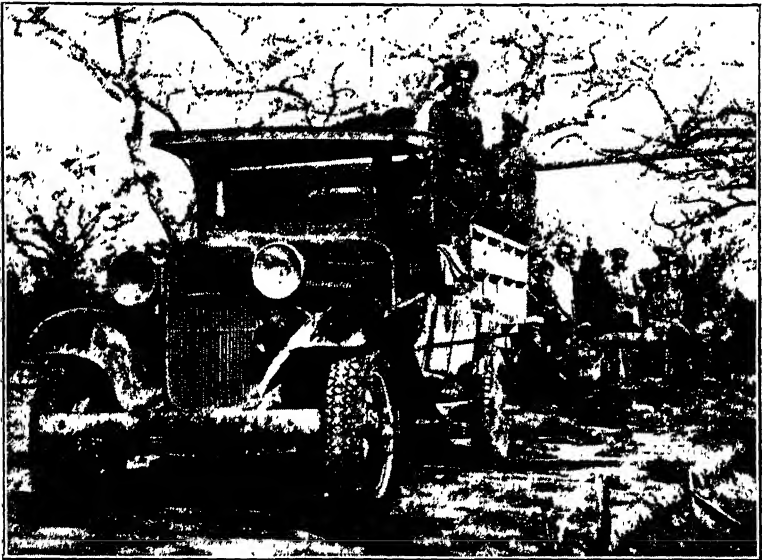
So Estigarribia set himself to arm Paraguay at the expense of the enemy. Time and again daring flanking movements brought about the surrender of enemy troops, when, with ordinary determination, they could have cut their way through. Not once in a dozen times did the Bolivians call Estigarribia's bluff. They were never sure of the numbers against them, and showed no ambition to find out. It was enough for them that they appeared to be surrounded.

In this manner huge quantities of war materials fell into



BOLIVIAN DEAD. THE CHACO ITSELF WAS BOLIVIA'S GREATEST ENEMY

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PARAGUAYAN WATER CAMION AT IRENDEGUA

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Paraguayan hands, and, except for artillery, they must have been very nearly as well armed as the Bolivians when they carried the fight to them in the August of 1933.

From September to the middle of December the Paraguayans were pressing furiously for a definite advantage before the heat and rains of summer practically put a stop to advances; but it was not until December 11th that Estigarribia's troops were rewarded with anything in the nature of a decisive victory. Little by little they had forced the enemy back, but General Kundt still held on grimly in his headquarters at Muñoz.

On the 11th, in the battle of Centeno-Gondra, some of the finest of Bolivia's troops suffered defeat, and apart from prisoners, 20 field pieces, 25 trench mortars, 100 camiones, 2 tanks in usable condition, and a great quantity of rifles and ammunition, were captured.

Bolivia's chances of conquest were at an end, and she must have known it. It was time for Hans Kundt to evacuate Muñoz and to bring all his energies to the task of stemming the Paraguayan advance. It was time also for Bolivia to seek "peace with honour," and this she tried to do.

On the 19th of December, 1933, a two weeks' armistice was declared while peace talks under the auspices of the League of Nations proceeded in Monte Video. The only result was an extension of two weeks in the armistice.

VI. EFFORTS FOR PEACE

During the three years of the Chaco war there were seventeen unsuccessful attempts at making peace. First under the auspices of the United States, then of the A.B.C.P., followed by the League of Nations, and again the A.B.C.P. Both combatants blame failure unequivocally in each instance to the other. In each case Paraguay and Bolivia declare that they were struggling for peace, but that all efforts were repulsed by their enemy. Both combatants are, of course, wrong.

In the beginning Paraguay had been prepared to cede a fair proportion of territory to Bolivia. After the outbreak of hostilities Bolivia's claim to the littoral of the Paraguay river became the bone of contention at all peace conferences. On that basis, winning or losing, Paraguay would not discuss anything.

Bolivia insisted, and blamed the breakdown of efforts to Paraguay. Later, as success came the way of Paraguay it followed that her mood towards territorial concessions tightened. She was prepared to cede less and less, and finally, when she had pushed the Bolivian troops over the Parapiti and back into the hills, her one-time willingness to concessions had see-sawed to demands.

Bearing in mind that the Chaco belonged to Paraguay, and that, first shot or not, no stretch of the imagination can make her the aggressor, we may say her attitude was logical, and certainly human.

There were other stumbling blocks. Always the basis of a peace conference was a suspension of hostilities during discussion, and it was found impossible to arrange a suitable adjustment of war positions between the two sides. Also there were times when a suspension would have annulled the advantage held by one side or the other, and the failure of the ensuing conference to bring a settlement could not be risked.

At any rate, for reasons of this kind every effort towards peace proved abortive. On the failure of the "Washington Neutrals," Argentine, Brazil, Chile and Peru took over the difficult task at the end of 1932. The relations of these four countries together were none too cordial. Many Chileans and Peruvians were fighting in the Bolivian lines and serving as officers, while a number of Argentines fought for Paraguay.

Argentine was quite definitely on Paraguay's side, and it is certain that the littoral of the river was safe for Paraguay as long as she was on the council. Paraguay, I think, would have been quite secure in leaving that matter to arbitration, and I believe she would have received a fair deal from Brazil.

Unsatisfactory as this may appear it, nevertheless, had a better chance of working than any other combination. The A.B.C.P. represented the interested parties, having definite concerns of their own in the final settlement. And it was up to South America to settle her own troubles. Outsiders might have pleased no one, and, in fact, pleased the fewest possible when their turn came.

The first formula as a basis of peace discussion was presented to the combatants by the A.B.C.P. in February 1933, and was called the formula of Mendoza. Both sides, as I have indicated, suggested what they termed minor alterations. Minor, or not, they were sufficient to break up the Mendoza conference. Paraguay, for example, said that the Bolivians must withdraw to their base at Robore and Ballivian on the Pilcomayo, barely two hundred miles short of Villa Montes. The Bolivians, in short, were to withdraw within the original "zona en litigio" shown on the map issued by the Mihanovich Company.

At the time of this peace endeavour General Hans Kundt was launching his attacks against Nanawa and Gondra. That speaks for itself.

These failures were translated by outside nations as a proof of the incapacity of South America to settle its own affairs. The question of the Chaco now passed to the League of Nations, but the A.B.C.P. still remained in the capacity of go-betweens. The first move suggested was that a Neutral Commission should visit the scene of war. With this object in view the A.B.C.P. presented a second formula, known as the formula of Rio de Janeiro, on the 25th of August.

Again both sides claimed the other had refused the terms. A glance at the state of the war in the Chaco will throw some light on the subject. The second Bolivian offensive of July was already failing. The Paraguayans, strengthened by great quantities of captured war materials, were getting a grip on the situation. Frankly, I feel that any peace formula with Paraguay conceding more than a moderate strip of the western half of the Chaco for arbitration was out of the question.

Yet Bolivia could not climb down without admitting the failure of her arms, and she was by no means prepared to do that. The war was not yet lost or won.

Finally, however, the armistice, on which my last chapter ended, was agreed, and the League Commission visited the Chaco. The phrase used by the Paraguayan Chancellor when arranging the armistice is interesting as showing the pride and temper of the Paraguayan people:

“La paz es preferible a un sitio en la historia!”

But peace was not to be. An extension of two weeks was negotiated, and then hostilities broke out anew. This failure was largely due to Bolivia's accusations against Paraguay of breaches of the armistice. It really began to look as though war was the only implement for a true settlement of the question.

In February 1934 the suggestions resulting from the report of the Neutral Commission proved equally unacceptable to either side. But the efforts did not cease. In July came a further peace formula from Buenos Aires, bearing the approval of Brazil and the United States. By that time the Bolivians had been driven back on their base at Ballivian, and the Paraguayans were fighting victoriously. It was too late.

The League of Nations continued to do its best, but South American opinion believes that it was a bad best. In attempting to steer a middle course, in effect, knocking the heads of the combatants together as a schoolmaster might with two scrapping boys, it offended the Paraguayans irrevocably. The League, I think, was badly advised by its Commission to the Chaco. It was a failure the League could ill afford. It seemed to lack that strength in the ultimate moment that a rigid observance of its covenant would have given it. Obviously it had the machinery—on “scraps of paper”—to prevent war. It failed dismally.

The reply of Paraguay to the League's endeavour was held to be tantamount to refusal, and an embargo was at once declared against the small nation who, rightly, considered that she was defending her own territory. Actually the embargo

meant next to nothing. Paraguay had purchased very little in the way of armaments, and had at that time captured enough for her needs.

In February 1935 Paraguay withdrew from the League, following Japan into outlawry. Yet Paraguay's action brought her sympathy, and levelled indignation towards Geneva.

Bolivia at once invoked article 16 of the League Covenant, declaring that Paraguay had committed an act of war against all League members. Nobody took any notice.

Brazil, by this time disgusted with constant failure, refused to join any further Conferences. Chile, also, was unwilling. The U.S.A., the A.B.C.P., the League of Nations—all the forces for peace the world could muster—had proved unequal to the task of settling the differences of two South American Republics over a territory that had been, up to the time of hostilities, almost a "tierra incognita."

It seemed that war would prove the only means of resolving the Chaco problem. When, at last, at the eighteenth attempt peace was signed in Buenos Aires, it was, indeed, war itself that had made peace.

VII. AN INTERLUDE—HALF-TIME IN THE CHACO

We now return to the Gran Chaco, and the real arbitrators in the dispute, during the Armistice of 1933–34. The war had reached the halfway stage, and there was probably least to be lost or gained by either army at this time by a cessation of hostilities.

The period of the Armistice marked the worst part of a Chaco year. The terrific heat of the sun was drawing steaming moisture from the sodden earth after the rains. A stifling blanket of heat had settled over the jungle. Horses, cattle, and all animals were losing condition, harassed by mosquitos, so poisonous as to cause the death of a calf if it were confined within the limits of a small corral. For men life was sheer horror. There is no peace in day or night of Chaco midsummer.

The going down of the sun heralds the arrivals of millions of the almost invisible insects known as pulverins, rendering nights in the open almost beyond human endurance. So night comes over the Chaco to the tune of an incessant shrieking music of the insects and huge frogs. Every bite of a pulverin gives a sudden pain, and one thousand bites would easily mark a night that was passed without protection. Only a very closely-meshed cheese cloth, or muslin, may bar the approach of the pulverin, and this, if obtainable, bars the passage of what air there is, and becomes insupportable.

In these conditions the two armies faced each other for four weeks without fighting, but there was no real rest or respite for man or beast, and the plight of the mountain men of Bolivia was one that must inspire sympathy. Their accustomed mountains lay hundreds of miles behind them across this terrible wilderness, and in every man's mind must have been a longing that their masters, arguing in distant Monte Video, would release them to make the long trek homewards with hope in their hearts.

Without their native stimulant of "coca" they would have been quite useless, and the maintenance of supplies to the troops was as pressing and difficult as anything the Bolivian authorities had to overcome. The rigours of thirst were scarcely eased by the cessation of fighting. Typhus, dysentery and malarial fevers became as deadly as enemy guns.

But for the Paraguayans the Armistice was a real respite. Victories had keyed them up. Their sufferings from climatic conditions; from the pulverins, mosquitos, and the dearth of water, were very much less than those of the enemy. There were no long communications to be maintained over roadless territory. They were still only a hundred miles from their river banks, and the Casado Railway made transport easy.

So the Paraguayans went about their business in good heart, sipping their yerba maté while their foes chewed coca leaves in a sullen stupor.

Fever, however, was not the monopoly of the Bolivians.

Typhus and dysentery spread also through the Paraguayan ranks, and their hospitals worked at full pressure.

The hospitals were no more than rough shelters, either of wood or adobe, with the earth of the Chaco providing a floor. In each there was a simple rough wooden table, made on the spot, and on these tables many a wounded man failed to return from the enforced sleep of the anæsthetic. A tin of hot water usually served for sterilizing the instruments, and it is strange there were but few cases of gangrene. The beds for the sick and wounded, whether prisoners or not, were made by stretching strips of raw hide taut between two poles.

In these terrible conditions the women of Paraguay, many of them young girls from the best families, tended their men. The Bolivians enjoyed no such happiness.

To many, the breakdown of peace negotiations must have been a relief.

Maybe it was a little worse for a wounded man to lie on a hide bed in the steaming yellow haze of heat and ether, the beads of sweat thick over his body, while his ears listened to the crash of war, than to listen to the shriek and hum of the jungle pests that beset him.

Either way it was horror; a hell on earth for the mountain men of Bolivia.

VIII. PARAGUAY SWEEPING ON TO VICTORY

As soon as the armistice was over the Paraguayan armies renewed their offensive. Success was immediate. Within three months the line that had been almost static during a year and a half moved in a wide arc westward nearly one hundred miles. All through the jungle a mass of swollen and rotting bodies marked the line of the Bolivian retreat. Hunger and thirst had accounted for hundreds. Often in the jungle small groups of the enemy were captured, wandering aimlessly in half-dazed condition. Prisoners were now becoming almost an embarrassment to Paraguay. At that time she had taken

between 15,000 and 20,000 prisoners and had transported them across the river which their government coveted so greatly.

Probably the most miserable man in the Chaco at this time was the German General, Hans Kundt, and the happiest must have been the young Colonel Estigarribia.

It is interesting to note, in view of the idea that South American armies have nearly as many generals and officers as men, that the Paraguayan army, until the elevation of Jose Felix Estigarribia in the spring of 1934, did not possess a single general. As to the "gorgeous" musical-comedy idea of a South American uniform, there was practically no difference in the dress of officers and men.

The Bolivian army, with its officers in smart military capes, measured up to the general idea a little more, but it was very far from approaching the point of absurdity. General Quintinilla, with whom I discussed the war in Bolivia, certainly looked like a general, but his uniform could not be described as "gorgeous."

Almost simultaneously with Estigarribia's promotion to the rank of general, the unfortunate German, Hans Kundt, was superseded, and Bolivian hopes were placed in the hands of the home produced General Peñeranda.

Peñeranda's instructions were, I believe, to retreat as gracefully as possible. There was little chance of doing anything else, and the Bolivian army would be gaining strength as it neared its bases.

Slowly Peñeranda fell back in a wide half-circle from south to north on his base at Ballivian, fighting every inch of the way. The position was slowly changing. As the Paraguayans advanced they suffered from the same difficulties of maintaining long communications that had so troubled Bolivia. It was now Peñeranda's turn to have access to supplies and reinforcements with all speed, while Estigarribia waited.

In the months of April and May some very severe counter-attacks were launched against the Paraguayans, and whereas during 1933 Bolivia had received reinforcements of roughly

60,000 men, in 1934 this figure rose above 100,000.

The 15,000 Bolivian troops launched against the Paraguayans at Cañada Strongest had not undergone the terrible rigours of the campaign of Nanawa and Gondra. But the Paraguayans had.

Bolivia claims this battle of Cañada Strongest as the greatest victory of the war. This is quite clearly absurd. For within a month the Bolivian army was even farther in retreat, and the war was raging around Ballivian itself.

One can only judge by the results. According to the press reports terrific battles were being won by both sides simultaneously. Side by side in the Buenos Aires papers there would be the report of the same battle issued by the Ministries of Asuncion and La Paz. Always both sides had won a tremendous victory.

One thing is certain: the Bolivians after Nanawa were in constant retreat until finally driven back on Villa Montes. One by one powerful forts and bases succumbed to the triumphant march of the Paraguayans, and the boats unloaded a rising tide of prisoners in Concepcion and Asuncion, as well as supplies of armaments bearing the Bolivian arms.

But there is no doubt that this battle of Cañada Strongest was the stiffest counter-attack Estigarribia had to repulse on his victorious way. Right through the campaign he was outnumbered by at least three to one, and in many of the battles by five to one. All my investigations in Paraguay and Bolivia show that there were, after the first few months, never less than 100,000 Bolivians engaged, and at most 30,000 Paraguayans.

IX. FALL OF BALLIVIAN

In June Estigarribia was throwing all the forces he could spare against Peñeranda in Ballivian, and for the first time since Nanawa there were doubts as to the successful outcome. The numerous fortins that had fallen were mere mud huts, rapidly reinforced by the defenders, but Ballivian was a power-

ful base, armed with all Bolivia's might, and linked, by means of a long chain of forts along the bank of the Pilcomayo, with the main base of Villa Montes.

In this position, always well supported, the Bolivians fought with renewed energy and heart. It was quite a possibility that the Paraguayans might, even now, so spend themselves in attack as to provide an easy prey to the new forces Bolivia still held in reserve.

On the 18th of June the Paraguayans succeeded in making a small gap in the enemy front line, only to be counter-attacked severely on the following day. It was not until the 8th of July, after more than a month of desperate assaults, that the Paraguayans succeeded in making a real puncture in the Bolivian fortifications.

This success was again followed by severe counter-attacks in terrific force, but the Paraguayans, with a foot in the door, held on tenaciously. The enemy was losing, and seemed prepared to lose three men to one, knowing that Paraguay had no such resources in man power as she had herself. Three to one was a fair exchange, and Bolivia could better afford it at this stage of the war than Paraguay.

Meanwhile battles were raging over a wide front, and the Paraguayans continued to gain ground rapidly in the direction of Santa Cruz.

On the 15th of August the Bolivian fort of Picuiba fell, and added greatly to Paraguay's stock of munitions. On the following days several well-defended positions to the north-west also gave way, and the enemy was in full retreat.

The great handicaps experienced by the Bolivians in the Chaco were again appallingly evident at the fall of Irendegua and Carandaytay.

Irendegua was evacuated by nearly 10,000 Bolivian troops in face of a small Paraguayan force, and it was found that the Bolivians had been entirely without water, and had not the strength left to fight.

Within twenty-four hours of Paraguayan occupation wells

had been sunk and water found in large quantities on the very site on which the Bolivians had died of thirst. So good were the supplies of water that the Paraguayans brought up a fleet of camions to distribute the liquid of life to their advancing army.

The route from this point to Carandaytay was blocked by the dead and swollen bodies of the Bolivians in retreat, and it was not surprising that 2,000 Paraguayans were able to occupy Carandaytay against a defending force five times greater.

But in spite of these successes the fortress of Ballivian to the southward still held out, and it was not until the middle of November that Estigarribia gained the victory. This time, however, the Bolivians had not evacuated in their usual hurry, and had given themselves time to fire the fortress before the Paraguayans took possession.

Nevertheless the victory was decisive, and brought the most valuable yield of arms and ammunition of the whole war.

For the first time the Bolivians were admitting their losses to the world while avowing their determination to fight on to the bitter end. In October 1934—when the fall of Ballivian was imminent—Dr. Jose Sainz, Ministro de Instruccion Publica de Bolivia, admitted in Buenos Aires that his country had lost two armies, but that they had yet a third equally good:

“*Reconozco que hemos perdido dos ejercitos, pero tenemos un tercero igualmente bueno——*”

By the end of the year the Bolivians were secure in Villa Montes, in their own town on the edge of the Chaco. All the power at their command in men and arms was within easy reach, and the fortifications were thought to be impregnable. From Espinal in the north to Santa Fé in the south the Bolivians were being driven back across the Parapiti river, and the blue wall of the Andes reared an impregnable barrier behind them.

It was felt that Estigarribia had done all that could be expected of him. In fact, he had done a great deal more. The

Bolivians were practically out of the Chaco, except for a section in the extreme north. The wise policy would be to hold them there without battering the Paraguayan army, hundreds of miles from home, against an enemy immensely superior in numbers and arms, and no longer so utterly destitute of morale. The position seemed to be stalemate.

But Estigarribia knew his own business best. Probably he feared that any kind of "letting up" might unleash a new Bolivian offensive upon him, and he was not prepared to sit down in front of Villa Montes with a fretful army on short rations. A false move might easily have cost Estigarribia all that he had gained.

Such was the state of the war when the League of Nations again permitted arms into Bolivia while keeping the embargo in force against Paraguay. Paraguay's answer was to retire from the League in disgust, and fight with added fury.

In Asuncion there was actually rejoicing. Reports of new supplies of arms reaching Bolivia were greeted by the populace with shouts of—Now we shall be able to replenish our own armaments!

Boxes of ammunition and rifles lying on the wharf at Antofagasta were often found marked in white chalk—Asuncion via La Paz.

THE END

Early in June 1935 Estigarribia succeeded in smashing the Bolivian defences at Villa Montes. It was the end. Estigarribia had achieved the impossible.

On the 12th of June, 1935, the Paraguayan and Bolivian Foreign Ministers signed the Peace in Buenos Aires. It was the eighteenth attempt. There still remained a vast intricacy of haggling to be done; of conferences; concessions and demands. But it was peace. Chile, Argentine and Brazil had agreed to adjudicate, and after that—if they failed—the Hague.

On the 13th of June there was a public holiday in Buenos Aires. The Avenida de Mayo from Plaza Mayo to Plaza Congreso was ablaze with lights.

But the lights in the Gran Chaco were still provided by the flash of guns, the bursting of bombs and grenades, and the spitting bark of rifle fire.

For the Peace, though signed, was not to take effect for forty-eight hours. While Buenos Aires, Asuncion and La Paz shrieked with delight a few more men must shriek in death.

On the 14th of June, at 2 p.m., Martin Tudela, a young Bolivian cadet, whose mother had doubtless suffered pains at his birth, was killed in the Gran Chaco—for no purpose whatsoever. He was the last man killed: that is his fleeting fame.

On the same day an individual named Swingle, an English-Bolivian, was taken prisoner. He was the last prisoner.

The war in the Gran Chaco was over.

CONCLUSION

It seems that the Hague Conference will be the final arbiter in the Chaco dispute. There have been numerous disagreements in the peace discussions. There was a rather difficult question in regard to exchange of prisoners. Paraguay had nearly 30,000. Bolivia had 2,600. Paraguay agreed to an exchange, and exchanged man for man.

Bolivia said: What about the 27,500 you still have?

It is an awkward point. These prisoners in Paraguay represent some of Bolivia's best men. Many of them have been in Paraguay since the first year of the war, and are now acclimatized. Paraguay, while the peace negotiations are in danger of breaking down, is naturally unwilling to return an army that might help to bring about her downfall in the event of a renewal of hostilities.

Paraguay feels that she has won the war, and wants the fruits of victory. I think she will have to be content to want.

But this war grew out of an urgent need caused by the loss by Bolivia of a previous war. A further war will grow again out of this one unless Bolivia's need is filled.

There is only one possible formula for peace in my opinion, and that is for Chile to cede a mile or two of her long coastline to Bolivia. She won it from Bolivia. She doesn't need it. She must give it back.

Bolivia has immense room for development. It is time she was getting on with the job. Paraguay, too, must develop, and it is distressing to hear of her internal political troubles. It is always a dangerous business to disband an army. The men who might have done it—Ayala and Riart—have been thrown out of office.

South America would like to have these troubles settled

finally. If the Hague in the final arbitration awards a port to Bolivia on the Paraguay river south of Bahia Negra there will be another war, and if Bolivia doesn't receive a port somewhere there will be another war.

Chile holds the key to peace in South America.

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